

# SUCCUMB

By: Pagan/KellyB

**SUMMARY:** A darker take on Anakin & Padme's courtship in the point of view of Padme. This is a companion piece to "The End Justifies The Means".

## **COMPLETE INFORMATION**

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**TITLE:** Succumb

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**DATE WRITTEN:** Autumn/Winter 2002 & Winter 2003

**SPOILERS:** The Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones

**RATING:** NC-17

**SUMMARY/TIME PERIOD:** AOTC and a bit of Revenge of the Sith from Padme's POV. This is a darker take on Anakin's courtship of Padme. In this story he is much more active in his pursuit and not as innocently boyish in his actions and methods. If you want to read a Disneyfied story of Anakin and Padme stop reading. This story focuses on the unhealthy aspect of their relationship. Namely that Anakin has a rather unhealthy fixation on Padme. There's a bit of mental coercion, obsession, aggressive seduction, and sex. If easily offended - don't read it.

**TYPE:** Romance, erotica, seduction, heaps o'angst

**DISCLAIMER:** I worship the ground the Flanneled One walks upon and I intend no infringement on the Lucasfilm characters, situations, or storylines. I am making absolutely NO money off this so suing would really be pointless, dear George. This story is merely for the titillation of rabid Star Wars fans like me who have way too much time on their hands.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** I have done my best to follow in the hallowed footsteps of George by utilizing the same formal speech patterns that Padme uses in the movie. So basically this gal does not use a hell of a lot of contractions. Force thoughts are designated by: //thought//. Normal thoughts are designated by: {thought}. Direct lines from AOTC (movie or novel) appear in italics.

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**Additional Note:** Due to a site crash there were some formatting problems - an entire chapter missing, words scrambled, etc. This was only recently brought to my attention and I'm just now getting around to fixing them. I have NOT added or changed the story in anyway since I last updated it. When you edit even one word at AFF.Net the system bumps your story to the first page.

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## Chapter 1: Succumb 1

### Prologue: Sometime during Revenge of the Sith

*"When lovely woman stoops to folly,  
And finds too late that men betray,  
What charm can soothe her melancholy,  
What art can wash her guilt away?"*

*Oliver Goldsmith*

Sometimes I cannot believe how much I have changed. The truth was once my faithful ally, my constant companion. Now I find myself wallowing in a bed of untruths, a bed that Anakin and I meticulously built together. It would be so easy to allow Anakin to shoulder the blame for everything, but my conscience will not allow it. But then, I ask myself, what is one more lie when so many have already been told? No, it is far too late for us to start being truthful. For if I was to open myself to the truth of our reality at this juncture my carefully crafted world would collapse.

Sometimes I cannot believe how little Anakin has changed. People who do not understand him, who do not know him as I do, think he has changed a great deal. They do not realize that he was always like this - deep down inside. My husband excels at the art of deception. He deceived Obi Wan Kenobi, Qui Gon Jinn, the Jedi Council, his fellow brethren, his own wife, and even himself.

The few people to whom I am truly close do not believe me when I tell them that Anakin Skywalker has given me more happiness and pleasure in these past few years than I could ever have imagined possible. They are only cognizant of the pain his actions have caused me. So I keep the growing sense of impending disaster to myself. There is no need to worry them when I know that nothing will change what is destined to happen.

I do not hate him. I could never hate Anakin. To hate him would be to deny him and that is something I cannot and will not do - at least not yet. I know the time of reckoning is fast approaching. The sun will soon set on the Republic, my marriage, my life, my Anakin. But in the time we have left, I treasure our love even as I hold on to the painful knowledge that too soon I will be forced to choose between Anakin and my hopes for the future. Whichever path I decide to follow the end result for Anakin and I will be the same. Neither of us will survive intact.

So I wait and I watch. I watch for Anakin to falter one last time; taking that last step that will damn his soul and shatter my heart into a million tiny fragments.

During the long sleepless nights, I occupy myself by remembering the past. I waste hours analyzing the events that led up to my present state. I reflect on that terrible, wonderful day when Anakin came back into my life. Once we met again was there a time when I could have escaped and forged a different path?

No, of course not.

The truth is it was too late for me the moment I stepped over the threshold of Watto's shop and a little boy asked me if I was an angel.

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***"If I should meet thee  
After long years,  
How shall I greet thee?  
With silence and tears."***

***Lord Byron***

I was vulnerable the day Anakin came back into my life. Cord's death had hit me hard and I was not allowed time to mourn. I had to remain strong and resolute for the people I represented. My

personal woes were unimportant when compared to the number of lives dependent upon my actions.

Anakin used that vulnerability to his advantage. He established one tiny foothold and forged on, ruthlessly breaching my defenses, determined to win me at all costs.

When he was a little boy Anakin had informed me that he was going to marry me. It was a sweet childish notion I had soon forgotten. But Anakin did not forget. The Force had told him of the future. Knowing we would meet again someday he had years to prepare to win me, to decide how best to go about making me fall in love with him.

I never stood a chance.

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It never occurred to me that Anakin would be accompanying Master Kenobi that day, although it probably should have. In truth I had rarely thought about that little boy whom I met so long ago.

I greeted Obi Wan with pleasure remembering with gratitude the assistance he and his fallen Master had provided my world when last we had met. When I finally turned my gaze to the young Jedi Padawan hovering impatiently in the background I failed to recognize him. That he was disconcerted by my seeming indifference was apparent. It was that brief expression of impatience at my lapse that gave me pause and caused me to take a second glance. I caught a glimmer of that slave boy I had met in that hot, dirty shop on Tatooine long ago. Blue eyes in a little boy's face; eyes that had made a queen shift restlessly under their watchful gaze.

*"Are you an angel?"* He had asked.

My eyes widened in recognition. He stepped forward and I was shocked to realize he now towered over me. I had to tilt my head back in order to meet his eyes. There was a decided intensity to his gaze and my cheeks flushed pink under his scrutiny. Something sparked between us in those initial moments and I blinked in surprise. It happened so quickly I convinced myself later I had imagined it.

But Anakin saw it. He could see everything when it came to me.

My reaction seemed to encourage him for his expression changed. He looked at me then, not in the way one looks at an old acquaintance, but in the way a man looks at a woman he desires. There was a strange fluttering in my stomach as he held my gaze unwaveringly. The rest of the people in the room momentarily faded into the background and I had to force myself to continue as if nothing had happened.

Flustered and a bit embarrassed at my reaction to his smoky gaze, I intentionally wounded his pride by remarking that I would always think of him as a little boy. It was his turn to turn red. Annoyance and hurt flared in those piercing blue eyes before he recovered himself and managed to settle his expression back into a mask of stoic Jedi calm.

I would come to hate that inscrutable expression. It hid too much.

\*\*\*\*

Something odd lurked beneath the surface of Obi Wan and Anakin's relationship. Beneath the respect and affection I detected a disturbing undercurrent of resentment and jealousy on Anakin's part.

I listened in bemusement to their tense exchange as the arrogant Jedi Padawan attempted to turn the predetermined limits of their mandate into a more active role. It was an overzealous and rather obvious attempt to impress me. It was also a presumptuous breach of etiquette and it clearly was not the first time that Obi Wan had been required to rebuke his charge for such behavior.

The Jedi and their ways were not overly familiar to me then despite the brief time I had spent in their company during Naboo's trouble with the Trade Federation. However I did know that a Padawan did not contradict his Master in private let alone in front of outsiders. Feeling uncomfortable at both the tension between the two Jedi and with Anakin's increasingly ardent glances, I made my escape under the guise of wishing to retire.

Anakin's piercing blue eyes followed me the entire way, boring into my back, willing me to turn around. I suppressed a shiver and fought the urge to look back at him one last time. It was unnerving.

When the chamber door slid shut I slumped back against it with relief, letting the odd tension slowly ease. Releasing a breath I had not realized I had been holding, I took a moment to compose myself then pushed away from the door. I had taken no more than two or three steps when I was stopped short as the oddest feeling came over me.

My head filled with a soft humming and I felt the sensation of a whisper-light caress against the back of my neck. With a gasp I spun around. Of course there was no one there. As suddenly as it had started the humming noise abruptly ceased. Ever practical, I shook my head ruefully at my over active imagination. I vowed to get a good nights rest and called for Dorm.

That was the beginning. The foothold was established, the campaign had begun, and I was the prize.

## **Chapter 2: Succumb 2**

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***"Love alters not with  
his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even  
to the edge of doom."***

***William Shakespeare***

I sent Dorm away after she had finished taking down my hair from its complicated style. Under normal circumstances I would have welcomed her company. She was a good friend with a genuine talent for helping me to momentarily forget my responsibilities and the often frustrating aspects of being a politician. I could always count on her to make me laugh at the latest bit of Coruscant gossip or Senate intrigue. But that evening I was not in the mood for fussing and idle chatter. Solitude was what I craved. I needed time to sort through the bizarre meeting with

Anakin and why he disturbed me so.

A senator's wardrobe is much simpler to deal with than that of a queen's but it is still a trial. I almost regretted sending Dorm away as I struggled with the intricate fastenings at my back. Lost in thought I slipped my gown from my shoulders and shrugged my arms out of the long sleeves. I was about to slip the bodice down when I remembered just whose eyes were in all likelihood monitoring the security cams. I froze and felt an uncomfortable prickling sensation at the back of my neck.

Anakin was watching me.

I had known that he was in the lounge area outside my bed chamber for I had heard Dorm speak briefly to him on her way to her own room. He was on watch alone. I had not yet heard Obi Wan returning from his earlier security inspection. Security cams were a way of life for all politicians in the Republic and I had long ago learned to ignore their presence. But now I was being watched by a young man who had made it quite clear that he found me attractive.

Technically he was not doing anything wrong. After all he and Obi Wan were there for the specific purpose of keeping me alive. But protector or not, I was decidedly uncomfortable with that turn of events. I did not want Anakin Skywalker watching me undress.

As I stood there debating how to get out of that potentially embarrassing situation a strange lethargy stole over me. I was still conscious of being watched but it no longer seemed as alarming as it had just moments ago. Even so I dared not raise my head. I had the oddest notion that if I were to acknowledge Anakin's "presence" by looking directly into the cam I might give in to a sudden and inexplicable urge to let my dress fall to the floor.

That compulsion I cannot explain. I had yet to know the intimate touch of a man but at that moment I had an overwhelming impulse to throw away propriety and stand there in my undergarments under the watchful and hungry gaze of a Jedi just over four years my junior. I trembled as I felt warm waves of desire wash over me. Those sensations were not emanating from me.

I stood there stiffly, my shoulders bared, hands clasping the front of my gown to my chest, and my eyes staring sightlessly at the floor. Panic set in when I found I was having difficulty formulating the internal command to move my legs. Mentally I shook myself, forcing myself to calm down and concentrate. As the panic subsided my body was once more mine to command and I was free.

I fled to the refresher where I changed into my nightgown without fear of an audience, taking a few deep breaths to steady myself. After a moment or two I started to feel extremely foolish. What in Force had just happened? Reason and practicality returned to chase away the disquiet. It had been an emotional day and I was exhausted. I convinced myself that the whole episode was the result of my sadness and guilt over losing Cord and the stress of finding myself the continued target of an assassination plot. When combined with the tedious journey from Naboo and my worry over the impending vote in the Senate, I thought it little wonder that my emotional state had not been even more tumultuous.

It was so much easier and less frightening to look at the obvious and ordinary for an explanation rather than to consider, even for a moment, that Anakin had been responsible for what had happened. It was too disturbing to think that Anakin would use the Force in such a manner.

Before I went to bed I made sure that the main security cam was covered.

It took me a long while to fall asleep.

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***"O who will tell me where  
He found thee at that dead and silent hour!"***

***Henry Vaughan***

I was jerked from a sound sleep when my bed was jarred sharply. My heart was pounding furiously and at first I was unable to absorb the chaotic scene unfolding before me. Anakin stood above me poised as if to do battle and an unpleasant burnt odor hung in the air. I heard Obi Wan shout and watched in amazement as he dove through the window shattering the glass with a sickening crash. Anakin instructed me to stay where I was and then he too was gone.

Long after the excitement died down and I had made Dorm retire for the second time that night; I sat up in bed thinking. I relived the way Anakin's eyes had appraised my form as he stood above me. His gaze had not been just a clinical check to make sure I was unharmed. I self-consciously hugged my legs closer to my chest, resting my chin on top my knees as I tried to figure out what had been happening to me since Anakin reappeared in my life.

I was disturbed by the amount of time I was spending dwelling on that compelling and overconfident young man. It had been less than a day and it seemed that almost every thought I had centered on what Anakin said, what he did, or how he looked at me. I was not use to so much emotional turmoil in my life and I did not like it. It felt as if I were playing a game whose rules I did not know and, what is more, one I had no memory of agreeing to participate in.

Anakin's attentions made me uncomfortable. But at the same time they excited me. The fact that I even felt such excitement at all alarmed me. All I wanted to do was stop thinking and start reacting. I wanted to wrap myself in the memory of him standing over me in the dark like some holovid hero.

He had been terrified for me. A woman he had not seen in ten years. I found myself wondering where such devotion came from.

"Are you an angel?" he asked me once.

Angels were perfect. I shifted uneasily as I realized part of the reason why Anakin's attentions concerned me so much. He saw me as an ideal, not as the person I truly was. This growing sense that I could never measure up to the image Anakin carried around was, for some reason, bone chilling in its intensity. We had exchanged almost no words that had not dealt with, for lack of a better word, business, yet his eyes had spoken volumes. I could see myself as he saw me in their reflection.

It can be lonely atop a pedestal separated from the crowd. Already I had a growing fear of what would happen when Anakin inevitably discovered I was a flesh and blood woman and not some paragon of perfection.



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I was oblivious to the passage of time. It was only when I was forced to change positions to lessen the ache in my back that I realized several hours had passed since the two Jedi had given chase to the assassin probe. I glanced around and realized belatedly that Dorm must have removed the burnt corpses of those evil creatures, though I had no memory of her doing so. My attention returned to the open doorway to find it no longer empty. Anakin had returned.

He approached my bed with arrogant confidence as if he often visited women in their sleeping chambers. I was surprised to feel a twinge of jealousy at that thought. Anakin's eyes glittered in the darkness and my throat constricted. I vaguely remember wondering where Obi Wan was but became too preoccupied with Anakin's approach and the thought slipped away.

Gingerly he sat down on the edge of my bed beside me. He watched me carefully as if I were some skittish animal ready to take flight if startled. I should have protested his familiarity when he sat down. It was very improper for us to be together on that bed in the early morning hours with no one to chaperon. If someone had seen us it would not have been looked favorably upon by either the government of Naboo or the Jedi Council. Worse, it would have been the unofficial topic of the Senate later that day. I had no desire to be fodder for their vicious rumor mill but, inexplicably, I found the thought of my reputation torn to shreds as inconsequential as what color of ribbon to wear in my hair.

That was what being with Anakin did to me. In an instant he could diminish my immediate concerns and worries to the dim recesses of my consciousness. He made me forget myself. So I did not request that he move away. I ignored that little voice in my head warning me of the impropriety. Instead I listened to the new voice that spoke in a hypnotic whisper, telling me to do something I should not do rather than what was expected.

He smiled at me softly. Something electric arced between us and a darker, more primal look entered his eyes. I shivered as Anakin's bold gaze wandered leisurely from my sleep tousled hair, over the contours of my face, and then lower, to where the lace edging of my nightgown rose and fell with my every breath. Under his heated stare my ability to breathe normally suffered and my cheeks grew warm. Indeed, I had to remind myself to perform the function or risk passing out from lack of oxygen.

After what seemed like an eternity Anakin's focus shifted back up to my face. Embarrassed I looked away unable to keep up the pretence that I was comfortable with his being perched on my bed in the middle of the night. I drew back sharply when he lightly touched my heated cheek with his warm fingertips. At my silent rebuke he dropped his hand but continued to study me intently. My level of discomfort rose dramatically under that heated gaze.

I was about to speak and break the growing tension when Anakin broke it himself. I kept my attention firmly focused on the foot of the bed as if it were the most fascinating thing I had ever seen as Anakin related the events of hours earlier. He told me of the dangerous chase around the city that had ended at a seedy nightclub. I winced when he told me of the confrontation between Obi Wan and the assassin. I could not have born yet another death on my account. Anakin ended the tale with how, upon exiting the club with the wounded changeling, an unknown person had killed the bounty hunter before either Obi Wan or Anakin had obtained any useful information.

A shaky sigh escaped me as I considered the unsavory idea that the person or persons responsible for Cord's death and the attempts on my life was still out there. My only consolation was that at least neither Obi Wan nor Anakin had been harmed.

Silence reigned for a few uncomfortable minutes before Anakin suggested that I try to get some sleep. My protests drew a determined frown from Anakin and before I knew what was happening I was being gently pushed down by invisible hands. He leaned over me. For one horrible but thrilling moment I thought he was going to kiss me. Instead he laid his hand against my brow and almost immediately my eyelids grew heavy and began to droop. I did not like being forced to do something against my will but even as I tried to fight it my body relaxed limply into the mattress and all my tension started to dissipate.

Anakin's hand slid down to lie against my cheek. It was a comforting gesture and I instinctively turned my face into his warm palm. A callused thumb stroked my skin lightly, reassuring and soothing to my troubled mind.

I was almost asleep when Anakin's touch changed from affectionately innocent to sensual - and completely inappropriate.

He trailed his fingers down my neck to lightly caress the bare skin just above my neckline. Clouded though my mind was, I was still aware enough to hear how his breath quickened. A second later his hand was running down my body with intimate familiarity. Even as my mind tried to work up the energy to formulate a protest at his daring, a sigh of contentment escaped me. Forming a coherent thought proved impossible with the weight of the Force coaxing me down into oblivion. Besides, his touch felt.....right.

Anakin's hand lingered enticingly at my hip. I could feel the heat of his touch through the thin shimmersilk of my nightgown. When he moved back to once again stroke my cheek I felt strangely bereft.

Did I dream the words that seemed to resound within my head as I finally slipped over the edge into sleep?

// Soon Padme, you WILL love me //

The softly whispered words were filled with the promise of lips touching, of flesh meeting flesh, of contented moans and limbs entwining. But lying beneath the surface of that seductive pledge was a darker message, one that spoke of obsession, anger, pain, possession and fear.

My heart only paid heed to that first promise.

### **Chapter 3: Succumb 3**

---

***"The bright day is done,  
and we are for the dark."***

***William Shakespeare***

I was most displeased.

I had been ordered home by Chancellor Palpatine. Anakin was to accompany me while Obi Wan investigated a lead on the assassin. I was furious and frustrated. For over a year I had worked to defeat the Military Creation Act and now I would not be allowed to stay for the all important vote. Leaving my responsibilities in the hands of Jar Jar Binks did not make me feel any better.

Would anything be different today if I had refused that direct order?

The Jedi Council, in all their considerable wisdom, made the decision to have Anakin escort me back to Naboo and then remain as my bodyguard until the situation improved. Anakin and I... alone together. My heart thudded uncomfortably in my chest.

In the cold light of day my musings and fancies of the night before seemed far away and not a little ridiculous. I was sure that I had imagined both Anakin's hand upon my body as well as the words in my head. But the fact remained that Anakin was too enamored with me for his own good. I could not help but think that this was hardly one of the wisest decisions that the Jedi Council had ever made. It was like sending a Jawa to guard the droid factory.

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I was surprised and impressed by what Anakin said. I had been voicing my resentment at being ordered home and his response was so...grown up.

"Sometimes we have to let go of our pride and do what is requested of us."

But such insight and maturity melted away minutes later as he voiced his complaints regarding his Master. Once again I sensed something deeper than just a young man straining to be free of the restrictions put upon him by a stern mentor. Absently, I wondered if Anakin would have had problems with any authority figure or was there just something about Obi Wan that raised his hackles? I could not help but speculate if Qui Gon Jinn would have fared any better in his stead.

Anakin's moods were mercurial. One minute he was wise beyond his years and then a split second later he regressed back to the child who had been forced to choose between his mother and a bright future as a Jedi Knight. He was such an odd mix of boy and man.

I did understand his impatience to graduate from Padawan to Jedi knight. It had been his dream from the moment Qui Gon Jinn had suggested it back on Tatooine. But I knew from experience that growing up was not the magic key to happiness. Thinking only of the boy Anakin had been, I reached up and gently touched the side of his face.

"Anakin. Do not try to grow up too fast."

Anakin's brooding expression changed to one of heated expectation. I quickly dropped my hand regretting my impulse to give in to the childish affection that we had once shared.

"I am grown up. You said it yourself."

His tone of voice suggested that he would very much like to prove to me just how grown up he

was. Our eyes locked and he took a step closer.

I stared up at Anakin, unable to look away from his compelling eyes. That odd fluttering feeling rose again in the pit of my stomach. I felt that connection between myself and the young Jedi and I was overwhelmed with an odd mix of desire and fear. My internal warning signals went off and I ruthlessly clamped down on the highly inappropriate and dangerous feeling that Anakin was inspiring as if it were a loathsome insect under my heel.

"Please don't look at me like that."

A slow arrogant smile spread across his face. A smile that implied he knew exactly how much he was getting under my skin and that he was enjoying my unease.

"Why not?"

Why not? Why not?! I wanted to scream at him, to slap him, to make him understand that he had to stop because he was turning my insides into knots with his knowing glances and his seductive smiles. His nearness, his calm certainty that he had me exactly where he wanted me made me distinctly uneasy and very nervous. It also intimidated me, frustrated me, and, Force help me, thrilled me in a way I had never before experienced.

Of course I did not say any of those things.

"It makes me feel uncomfortable."

I groaned inwardly at how incredibly weak my response sounded.

"Sorry, milady."

I had already turned from him, intending to retrieve more of my personal items for packing. In the wardrobe mirror I caught his expression as he murmured his apology and my step faltered. He did not realize that I observed the knowing smirk which played across his lips and effectively canceled out what little sincerity there had been in his words. Anakin was no longer making any effort to hide the hunger in his eyes. My stomach muscles clenched with shock and I had to stifle a gasp lest he hear and guess the reason why.

Anakin was making no pretenses. I had thought the intensity of his gazes disturbing enough before but they were nothing compared to the naked desire and longing that I saw reflected in his face at that moment. He was not sorry at all, far from it. With that look he was no longer the boyish Anakin but a man with a man's desire. And that desire was for me.

Keeping my face hidden, I busied myself pretending to look for some item at the back of the wardrobe. My knees were weak and it was all I could do to keep my body from slumping back against the wardrobe door.

I did not know what was happening to me. I had been desired by men before but this was something different. It was not just Anakin's interest that bothered me; rather it was the way my body was responding to him that disconcerted me so. Normally self-possessed and virtually unflappable, I now found myself spiraling out of control.

I could feel his eyes still upon me and the blood in my veins sang with an answering need. For

the first time in my life I experienced the unfamiliar feeling of physically wanting a man. I fought to quell my labored breathing and pounding heart.

I told myself that I had to remain strong for both our sakes. I was determined to remain the sober voice of reason in that unprecedented situation I found myself thrust into. How hard could it be I asked myself? The faint sound of mocking laughter seemed to echo inside my head.

How incredibly naive I was to imagine that I could stop what was happening. I was a fool, then and now.

---

***"Escape me? Never - Beloved!"***

***"While I am I, and you are you."***

***E.B. Browning***

Despite what Anakin had said on the transport I still believed that the Jedi had little in way of romantic or carnal experience. The rumors that had made their way around the Senate had always focused on the fact that the Jedi were supposedly celibate. It was commonly accepted that, by and large, Jedi were unfamiliar to love and relationships. It was believed that this was so they could focus all their concentration on mastering the Force and using it to maintain peace.

How I reconciled that popular belief with Anakin's ongoing behavior towards me is a mystery. I should have known better than to listen to rumors. I laugh now to think how innocent I was back then. Anakin, as I would find out in the not so distant future, had far more experience than I. He would prove adept at using his knowledge to turn my own body against me.

I was no stranger to being the recipient of seduction attempts and it had not taken me long to become a bit cynical when it came to romantic relationships within the confines of politics. As a politician in the Senate of the Republic, I was a prime target to any number of fellow delegates and lobbyists who had thought that they could lure me into their beds and thus influence my vote or gain political favors. Discerning their true motives was not a difficult task and I had no compunctions in spurning their laughably transparent advances. I had thought myself immune to affairs of the heart after awhile. This suited me greatly for I was determined to put my personal life aside to serve the greater good.

It was a fine and noble goal but it was also a lonely one. I did not realize how lonely until Anakin came along. He was so completely different from any man I had ever known. He ruined me for anyone else.

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I was on guard when we arrived on Naboo. For the most part Anakin had behaved himself during our journey from Coruscant. There had been a noticeable absence of ardent looks and innuendos. Only once did the conversation turn back towards the topic that I was so uneasy around.

"It must be difficult having sworn your life to the Jedi. Not being able to visit the places you like. Or do the things you like."

"Or be with the people I love?"

Anakin's eyes burned with intensity, watching me carefully for my reaction.

"Are you allowed to love? I thought it was forbidden for a Jedi."

"Attachment is forbidden. Possession is forbidden. Compassion, which I would define as unconditional love, is central to a Jedi's life, so you might say we are encouraged to love."

"You have changed so much."

"You haven't changed a bit. You're exactly how I remember you in my dreams."

I bent my head quickly to stare blindly at the contents of my dinner bowl. I could feel his eyes upon my bowed head, willing me to look back up into that mesmerizing gaze. My appetite had disappeared.

That conversation effectively ended our unspoken truce.

#### **Chapter 4: Succumb 4**

---

***"The prince of darkness  
is a gentleman."***

***William Shakespeare***

We were on the balcony of the retreat, overlooking the lake and the distant mountains, when Anakin first kissed me.

I had been watching the play of the light on the water as I told him of the time I had spent there as a child when I felt him touch the bare skin of my exposed back. It was a tentative touch that sent electrical pulses skittering across my flesh. I turned with every intention of stopping any further advances. Our eyes locked and instead of pulling back I allowed his hand to trail a path of his choosing. I was drowning in his hot, blue eyes.

So lost was I that I never noticed his face descending closer to mine. It was only when Anakin's warm lips brushed mine that I realized what had happened. He paused for a split second for my reaction and when I did not withdraw he continued. That first kiss was so unexpected and sweet that I lowered my guard and even moved my lips against his hesitantly. I was flooded with the sudden desire to deepen the kiss, to sink against him and lose myself to the feel of his mouth upon mine. Strange whispers reverberated in my head, insistently urging me to just give in under the pressure of Anakin's lips. And for a few mindless seconds, I obeyed them.

But what started out as a sweet kiss turned into something more when Anakin used his tongue

to begin a gentle tracing of my lips. At that unexpected contact, I came to my senses abruptly. Flustered, I drew back, struggling to regain my composure.

"No. I- I should not have done that."

I turned back to the view trying to act as if nothing had happened; that I had not just done the one thing I should never have allowed.

The more experienced woman of the world had a duty to remain firm and in control, I told myself resolutely. I knew that I should have stopped him immediately instead of behaving like a Coruscant tease. Sending such mixed messages was cruel and beneath me yet to my complete dismay I found myself doing it over and over as the days slid by.

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That first day at the retreat left me feeling distinctly out of sorts. I was not use to being idle and it was against my nature to ignore my duties. My fingers itched to dig into the pile of work I had been forced to leave behind on Coruscant. But most of all, I desperately needed something to keep my mind occupied. Without my usual workload to distract me, I found myself dwelling almost obsessively upon Anakin and the feelings that he stirred within me.

I began to feel further and further removed from the dangers on Coruscant and the real world with each passing day. Gradually my sense of guilt lessened and I started to relax. For the first time in a long time I was able to just be Padme and I relished it.

We spent our unaccustomed leisure time exploring the immediate countryside, enjoying the natural beauty for which the Lake District was known. The more time I spent in Anakin's company the more glimpses I caught of the adult version of Anakin's childhood self. His innocent boyish smile coupled with his often laughing blue eyes enchanted me; lulling me into a false sense of security.

The words of unsolicited advice from my mother and sister kept replaying in my head during that heady time. Initially I had disregarded their concerns that I was sacrificing my personal life in favor of my desire to help others. After all, the lack of romantic entanglements in my life had been more of a help than a hindrance. But suddenly, I found myself wondering if my family was right after all and was instantly disturbed by that train of thought. I had always been so sure of my life's direction and to find myself suddenly filled with doubt left me restless.

Indeed, so preoccupied was I in questioning my life choices that I found myself behaving in contradictory ways when around Anakin. One minute I would find myself flirting with him shamelessly and the next I would be standoffish and distant. My conflicting emotions and behaviors drove me to distraction. Anakin did not much appreciate it either.

Even the way I dressed was affected. Freed from the elegant but uncomfortable clothes of a Nubian senator, I indulged myself in wearing my most flattering and attractive clothing. I denied it to myself but deep down I knew I was dressing to please a man. The same man that I was determined to keep at arms length.

How I despised myself.

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I look back on that day in the meadow as a turning point in my life. On that warm sunny afternoon Anakin forced me to acknowledge the truth as I was awakened to all that I had been missing. He gave me my first taste of passion and once unleashed it would prove impossible for me to rein in. Though I tried, gods, how I tried.

We lounged side by side, replete from the meal we had brought with us, letting the sun warm our faces. I basked in the beauty of the wildflower strewn meadow surrounded by the majestic waterfalls. It was truly my favorite spot on Naboo. I remember thinking that I had never had a more perfect day. I felt more carefree than I had since entering the world of politics at the age of twelve. With a surprised start I realized that exactly half of my life had been spent in the service of others.

Occasionally a stray band of mist from the closest waterfall would reach us and Anakin would glance at them briefly in renewed awe. Normally the sight of so much water would have held Anakin's full attention for hours at a time. The young man who had spent the first ten years of his life on a barren dessert world could never get over the sight of so much water in one place. But that day the falls were virtually ignored in favor of watching my every move.

Once again I was flooded with that uneasy feeling that I only seemed to experience when with Anakin. He had that predatory air about him again as if he were stalking his prey.

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I disappointed Anakin. Perhaps I even wounded him. He was stunned to learn I had shared a chaste kiss with a boy whom I had known years before Anakin had even come into my life. Most women my age had done far more than kiss by twenty four and he knew it well. He tried to downplay his disappointment but I, glad for once that it was he who was feeling disconcerted, unwisely went on to describe the recipient of my first kiss in stereotypical girlish detail. He cut me short and did not press further. I thought he had accepted it as the innocent childhood event it had been but soon I was to discover I was to be punished for that unknowing transgression.

We argued lightly about politics. The views he expressed proved exactly how little he knew about how the system really worked. Anakin spoke of politics as if everyone were straightforward and honest. He made no allowances for hidden agendas and the inevitable dirty deals. Then he took me by surprise when he suggested that his ideal form of government would be one where people would be made to agree by someone wise. When I told him what he proposed sounded suspiciously like a dictatorship his reply shook me.

"Well, if it works."

His expression was solemn and hard.

Despite the warm sunshine I shivered and a frisson of apprehension ran down my spine. Then, in yet another example of his quicksilver temperament, Anakin lips began to quirk and his eyes danced with suppressed mirth. I realized with a great sense of relief that he had been teasing me. He denied it laughingly saying that he would be much too frightened to tease a senator. I smiled in response but lapsed into a watchful silence as I tried to measure the truth of his words. Who was Anakin? The fact that he was not easy to categorize intrigued me.

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Anakin lied to me that day. He told me that Jedi mind tricks only worked on the weak minded. It was a deliberate untruth told to mislead me. If the person targeted was vulnerable enough or trusting enough, the trick worked on them as well. I should know better than anyone because it worked on me - over and over again.

I truly thought that Anakin had injured himself when he fell from the back of the shaak. My heart dropped as he struggled to rise only to fall back down and lie unmoving. I ran to his side calling his name in a panic. I turned him over with trembling hands only to find him shaking silently with laughter that erupted the moment he was on his back. I swatted at him in vexation, annoyed at how easily I had fallen for his ruse. Anakin avoided my blows easily and soon had captured my wrists in a firm grip. With a sharp tug he jerked me forward so that I fell into him. Knocked off balance, we tumbled down the slight incline laughing like children until we came to a rather sudden halt.

In all probability we should have rolled several feet further but I suspect that Anakin used the Force to manipulate me into the position that I found myself in.

Anakin lay beneath me, hands holding me steady at my waist, laughter and something else that I dared not put a name to shining in his eyes. I sat low on his torso, my legs straddling his hips in a compromising fashion, my hands splayed on the ground just above his shoulders.

I stared down at Anakin and was struck with the notion that all I had to do was just relax my arms and I would be lying against his warm body. I blushed crimson; the laughter dying in my throat as I suddenly became aware of the total inappropriateness of my position. I started to rise but Anakin's grip at my waist tightened to hold me firmly in place.

My mouth opened to reprimand him, to chastise him for such liberties. But before I could get the words out his hands began to gently knead my sides; slowly, deliberately. I froze as a curl of unfamiliar excitement shot through my body and I realized with dismay that I wanted nothing more than to let him continue with that delicious caress. Afraid that he would be able to see that wicked thought reflected in my eyes, I hurriedly shut them.

That was a mistake.

Without the distraction of any visual stimuli my sense of touch was heightened. I became acutely aware of the way Anakin's hands were causing the fabric of my gown to rub sensuously against my skin, of the heat of his body between my thighs, and the way his hard muscles tensed beneath my fingers. A wave of heat enveloped me and I barely managed to suppress the sigh of pleasure that rose up in my throat.

The meadow sounds faded into the background. I was only aware of our unsteady breathing and the pounding of my own heart. I felt lightheaded, almost dizzy. My senses were being overwhelmed and I desperately needed to focus on something solid to stem the tide of vertigo.

I opened my eyes to find Anakin still watching me, his expression one of raw wanting. I was at once alarmed and exhilarated to find myself the object of such unguarded desire. My heart lodged in my throat as I felt an answering rise of lust in my own body. I could not think, I could not move, I could only stare wordlessly into those blue eyes which bored into mine and refused to release me.

Anakin's hands leisurely moved up my ribcage. His heated touch seeped through the stiff material of my dress leaving a scorching trail in its wake as his hands roved slowly upwards. When they slid up and over my breasts a violent tremble ran through me. I sucked in my breath harshly and my eyes flew wide in shock. No one had ever touched me so intimately, no one had ever dared. Before I could summon any words of protest from my dazed state, Anakin reversed directions and slid his hands around to run up and down my back. With each pass his touch became a little firmer, a little more insistent. Delicious chills ran through me and I involuntarily moaned. I gripped his shoulders harder trying to keep myself from losing my hold on reality but the line was fast beginning to blur.

Then Anakin smiled at me.

And I fell.

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It was I who gave the first kiss that day. Anakin did not have to apply any pressure against my back. Without conscious thought I lowered my body so that my breasts were pressed firmly against his long, lean frame. Then it was his turn to moan and the sound caused my breath to hitch in my throat. Our faces were so close I could see the different variations of blue in his eyes.

Only the smallest of gaps separated us but Anakin made no move to bridge it. He watched me intently through heavy lidded eyes, waiting to see what I would do. All the while his hands at my back never stopped their insistent caressing.

The tension became unbearable and with a shuddering sigh I finally succumbed to temptation. Ignoring the inner voice that told me I was playing a very dangerous game, I lowered my mouth to place a soft kiss against his waiting lips. My intentions were for a somewhat chaste and short kiss but Anakin did not allow it to end that way.

I started to pull away and was unprepared for the suddenness of Anakin's response. In an eye blink, Anakin had flipped me onto my back and pinned me beneath him, trapping me under the weight of his body.

He came to rest between my thighs, hips pressed against mine, forearms resting on the ground at either side of my head. I stared dumbly up at him, stunned at the swiftness in which our positions had changed. His eyes glittered with insatiable hunger and the seriousness of my situation seeped into my consciousness.

I pressed my hands against his chest with the intention of stopping him from getting any closer while arching my back in what proved a fruitless attempt to dislodge him. My hips pressed into his and Anakin made an odd noise at the back of his throat at my unintentionally provocative action. There was a determinedness about him that frightened me. It dawned on me then that if I had ever had any control over the situation I had lost it. I was in over my head.

In a shaky voice I whispered, "Anakin, please..."

The rest of my words trailed off as he smiled at me smugly. With his face hovering just a few centimeters above mine he broke the silence with a husky murmur.

"Please, Padme? I think I rather like to hear you beg, milady." His breath was hot against my lips.

My eyes widened and a shiver ran through me at the import of Anakin's words. He felt my body tremble beneath him and he smiled again but this time there was something darker lurking in his eyes. I could not have looked away from him then had the entire Gungan army passed within a meter of where we lay.

After a moment Anakin grew somber and his eyes hardened.

"I wasn't your first kiss." A sharp note of jealousy shaded his words. "But Padme, I swear I will be the only one you kiss from this day forward."

With that vaguely threatening statement hanging in the air, Anakin's mouth descended to cover mine in a bruising but passionate kiss that drove all other thoughts from my mind. A white hot fire ignited inside me and I had trouble recalling exactly why I had been fighting Anakin's advances.

Demanding lips slanted over mine hungrily, forcing my lips apart with a constant barrage of nips and licks. I whimpered in protest at his fierceness, a possessive growl from Anakin was the only response I received. When I tried to turn my face away from the onslaught he grasped my chin firmly with one hand and the other threaded its way through my hair to cradle the back of my head.

Anakin plunged his tongue between my lips to explore my mouth, coaxing my tongue to entwine with his. A strangled groan escaped me. I had never been kissed liked that in my life and my resistance started to melt like a snowball on Tatooine. My arms snaked around his neck pulling him closer and I ran my fingers through his spiky hair. Emboldened by my response he released my chin and ran his hand down over the curves of my body. Anakin's greedy mouth swallowed my sigh of pleasure. I knew I was entirely out of my element - but I did not want him to stop.

When Anakin moved his lips away from mine a cry of complaint rose from me. He smiled against my cheek before running his tongue along the sensitive skin just below my ear. As he moved down the length of my neck, nipping and kissing the delicate flesh, the sensations became too much and my fingers reflexively gripped tighter, tugging at his hair and digging into the skin at the back of his neck as my body surged helplessly upwards against his.

Anakin's hot tongue teased the pulse point at the base of my throat with gentle flicks before drawing the soft flesh in with a hard suck, marking me as his. The soft cries and sighs that he elicited from me mingled with his own moans and growls. My entire world was reduced to the feel of Anakin's hands on my body and the wonderful things he was doing with his lips, teeth and tongue. Nothing else existed anymore, not the Jedi, not the Republic, not the societal rules that said what we were doing was wrong. All that existed was the raw aching need growing inside me with each passing second.

Then Anakin moved lower and time stood still.

His hands moved back to roughly caress my breasts through the material of my gown while his wet tongue traced a path along the skin just above the neckline of my bodice. My nipples hardened in response and I cried out as he flicked his tongue beneath the material's edge to taste the hidden flesh beneath. My back arched sharply, thrusting my breasts against his hands.

Dimly my mind registered that Anakin had slipped the straps of my dress from my shoulders and was easing my bodice down, kissing each centimeter of newly exposed skin. Warning bells rang in my head and I made a desperate grab to stop my gown's descent. It was too much, too fast and I knew instinctively that I could not cope.

Anakin's hands stilled as he lifted eyes heavy with desire to my face. I could read his intention to push my hands away and continue on despite my wishes as clearly as if he had spoken the words out loud. A low cry of protest sounded from the back of my throat. My body tensed beneath his at the sight of that ruthless gleam. My frightened reaction drew a sudden frown from him. The fear and apprehension in my eyes finally sank in and with a sigh of resignation Anakin reluctantly released his hold on my bodice.

He breathed my name softly as if it were something unbearably precious to him, reaching up to cup my face between his reassuring hands. A warm, apologetic smile played on his lips. The unease began to dissolve as his thumbs lightly stroked my cheeks, drawing me back in to that surreal world of passion. My eyes dropped to his lips aching to taste them again. With a knowing laugh, Anakin obliged my unspoken request and leaned in to capture my mouth. I sighed, willingly parting my lips under that sweet pressure, meeting his tongue without need of any coaxing on his part. As the kiss deepened I let the anxiety of only moments ago slip away and once again lost myself to Anakin's experienced ministrations.

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It was not until Anakin shifted slightly to the side that I became aware of a cool breeze tickling the exposed skin of my legs. With a start of surprise I realized my skirts were hiked up to almost mid thigh and probably had been since Anakin first rolled me over.

As my hazy mind started to assimilate that information, Anakin groaned my name hoarsely into the hollow of my throat and ground his hips against me. His hard arousal pressed into me and, inexperienced though I may have been, I knew what that hardness against my thigh meant.

In my mind's eye I saw my parents disapproving faces and the disappointment in their eyes at my wanton behavior. They would die in shame if they found out that their unwed daughter, a former queen and a respected senator was allowing a man to lie atop her, kissing and touching her so intimately.

When Anakin slid his hand under my skirt to stroke my bare thigh it was the last straw. The seriousness of the situation finally struck home and I knew I had to end it immediately before it was too late; though I already knew that we had crossed too many lines to escape unscathed.

Adrenaline lent me strength and I shoved hard against Anakin's chest. Caught off guard he fell to the side and I rolled quickly away before scrambling to my feet. I stood frozen for a moment, staring down at him in dazed disbelief.

It was as if some spell had been broken.

Shame at what I had let Anakin do flooded through me. How could he have made me forget myself so quickly? Why had I allowed him to touch me as no one else ever had?

Because, an evil little voice whispered, you have wanted this from almost the first moment you

saw him again. I shook my head in denial as if those damning words had actually been spoken aloud. I was trembling so hard I thought my legs would give way any second.

Anakin's initial surprise at being unceremoniously pushed away faded into anger and frustration. My fear and embarrassment did not even register with him, he was only aware that he had been thwarted. A sullen expression wiped all traces of drowsy sensuality away from Anakin's face. He did not look pleased at having been both bested and denied.

I hesitated.

Half of me wanted to fall to my knees beside him and finish what he had started and, if I were to be honest, what we both wanted. But the other half, the wiser half, told me to run and never, ever stop.

"Padme."

Anakin's voice grated harshly in my ears. The look in his eyes when he reached out for me jarred me into action. Stumbling backwards I gave into that whispered warning in my head and without a word I turned and fled.

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***"They flee from me that  
sometime did me seek."***

***Sir Thomas Wyatt***

I heard Anakin call my name but I did not stop. I was reeling from what I had allowed to happen. I felt completely disoriented as if a stranger had taken up residence in my body, a stranger with the morals of a harlot. Padme Naberrie did not behave like a whore, I screamed in my mind. An agonized sob tore from my throat. I did not know who I was anymore and that terrified me.

I tore down the slope and into the trees in a blind race to escape what had just happened. Bushes and low limbs snatched at my hair and clothes, slowing me down and therefore increasing my agitation. Above the hammering of my heart and my harsh breathing, I could hear Anakin in hot pursuit. The sound of undergrowth crunching loudly in his wake was accompanied by angry curses that fueled my desire to get away. Pounding footsteps, harsh panting that morphed for one terror induced moment into something almost machine-like. My only thought was that I had to get away before it caught me.

With each footfall my sense of panic increased. I became illogically convinced that something unspeakable was chasing me instead of just a rejected Jedi. My fight or flight instinct kicked in and though my pace picked up it was not enough to escape.

Anakin caught me easily. It was laughable to think that I could have outrun a Jedi with Force enhanced speed especially dressed as I was. My skirts were light but cumbersome and they certainly were not made for ease of running. I had almost tripped twice by the time he reached me. I let out a startled scream when Anakin's hand grabbed my upper arm and he spun me around hard to face him.

I made to wrench my arm from his grasp but his hold was too strong. I caught sight of his

thunderous expression and it did little to calm or reassure my tattered nerves. My emotions were raw and I lashed out at him blindly, hitting any part of him within reach as I fought for freedom. I heard my name again, first spoken in anger and then repeated with growing concern as my desperation finally registered.

With insulting ease Anakin avoided most of my wild blows and gathered me to him. In short order I found myself with my back held flush against his chest and his arms wrapped around my middle, effectively pinning my own arms harmlessly at my sides.

For a long while, I held my body rigid against Anakin's, unable and unwilling to separate my irrational fears from reality. With infinite patience he continued to hold me, making soft, soothing noises against my ear as he rocked gently from side to side. The sound of his crooning and the warmth of his body against my back slowly worked their magic. And as my breathing and heart rate gradually returned to normal, I wearily relaxed back into his embrace.

I lost track of how long he held me to him. His mesmerizing nonsense words wove a comforting song inside my head that made me feel as if I were floating within the circle of his steady arms. I closed my eyes and let myself drift as Anakin's lips moved against my hair and his breath warmed me.

The sun was just beginning to set when Anakin put me away from him and gently turned me to face him. I stood very still as he reached down to tenderly, almost reverently, trace the contours of my face with his fingertips as if he were trying to memorize its feel and shape. Anakin's eyes met mine and he smiled.

In that split second I caught a glimpse of the man he would have been had he not been born with all the power of the Force at his disposal - without the burden of being the Chosen One.

Then the moment vanished as quickly as it had happened.

"I didn't mean to frighten you." He said quietly. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

He sounded so concerned, so contrite. In another life he might have been an actor in the holovids.

I did not trust my voice so I shook my head quickly. A look of relief crossed his face and then, without preamble, he dropped to his knees before me. I started with surprise.

When he enveloped my hands within his larger ones I was too exhausted to offer any resistance. He studied them for a moment and then turned his face up to mine, his eyes suddenly shy.

Anakin spent the next few minutes apologizing to me as I stared down at him. He gallantly took the blame for all that had transpired and I let him. I wanted it all to be his fault. It was so much easier than acknowledging to myself I had been a willing participant.

I was only peripherally aware of the calming buzz that sounded in my head, weaving around my consciousness in tandem with the soothing strokes Anakin was applying to my imprisoned hands.

Perhaps it was Anakin inside my head attempting to smooth away my panic and fears. Or

perhaps it was my own weariness coupled with my growing desire to forgive him anything, no matter the cost or consequence. Regardless, the end result was the same.

Anakin rose to his feet and we stood looking at each other for a few moments, neither of us speaking for fear of breaking the sudden calm. I made no move to pull my hands away from his and was rewarded with a gentle squeeze. Anakin bent down and placed a soft kiss on my forehead. It was the gesture of the gentle and kind Anakin, the one who had risked his life to help a group of complete strangers so many years ago.

We made our way back to the lake retreat in silence, my hand clasped in his.

Later I remember thinking how unlike me it was to go from such a turbulent emotional state to one of utter calm in such a short time span. Odd for me perhaps but it was standard practice for the Jedi.

## **Chapter 5: Succumb 5**

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***"No light, but rather darkness visible."***

***John Milton***

Secrets destroy. One lie turns into another and before you realize it you are unable to recognize the truths that you once held as self-evident. Were we ever real Anakin? Or were we always a lie, a lie created by you and nurtured by me?

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Two days had passed since that torrid scene in the meadow. Since then Anakin had remained in the mode of protector and friend, bidding his time until his next move.

Anakin spent the time regaling me with stories of the many missions and adventures that he and Obi Wan had shared since last I had seen them. He went out of his way to deliberately make light of many of the situations to amuse me, to stop me from dwelling on the way he had tried to seduce me that day in the meadow.

But at the same time he wanted me to remember. He wanted me to remember the way his body had pressed against mine, the way he had used his hands and mouth to make me whimper and shudder beneath him, and the feel of his hardness grinding against me through burdensome clothing. And above all, he wanted me to remember that I had wanted him with the same hunger that he had for me, that I was not being honest with myself or him. He wanted me to know without a doubt that what was between us was something I could not hide from or pretend did not exist.

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Anakin lacked the smooth and practiced lines that the more cosmopolitan men of Coruscant and Naboo brandished. When it came to expressing his feelings he was clumsy but sincerely impassioned. There was no artifice to Anakin. He spoke from the heart without reservation,

making no effort to hold anything back. His strength lay in the fact that there were real feelings behind the rather clichéd words that tumbled from his lips. I found him utterly disarming - and utterly disturbing.

I wondered if he was even aware of the words he used to describe his feelings.

"Agony....Tormenting me.....Can't breathe.....Haunted ..... Scar."

It could never work, he had to know that. It was impossible. A Jedi Knight and a senator? I tried to tell him that it was not feasible but he determinedly forged ahead demanding that I listen to him. I struggled to remain focused and rational. I was not going to let myself be swayed by my physical desires. With every last ounce of willpower I possessed, I escaped from his side where I had spent the last few minutes squirming uncomfortably at his impassioned declaration.

My pleas to remember who we were and what positions we held fell on deaf ears. Anakin's mind was already working to find a way around my sound reasoning.

I watched his tall figure move into the shadows as he considered what to say next. When he turned to face me again I noticed the way the flickering fire light transformed his young face into the hard planes of a determined man.

"It doesn't have to be that way. We could keep it a secret."

I gaped at him, disbelief and dismay washing over my face. I groped for the right words to make him understand that what he was suggesting would only end up destroying both of our lives.

I did not like the look on his face as he seemingly acknowledged the truth of my words. Anakin was giving in much too easily for someone who had just made such a vehement declaration. Deep down I think I knew that Anakin was allowing me a hollow victory to lull me into thinking he was accepting the reality of our situation. When in actuality he had every intention of continuing to whittle away at my defenses until I had no other option but to yield.

Anakin Skywalker never gave up when he wanted something. And what he wanted then was me - and my unconditional surrender.

As he walked away I imagined that I heard his voice inside my head and I shuddered.

//Accept it, Padme, you belong to me//

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I slept very little that night. I had gone around and around with what to do about Anakin and my unwelcome feelings for him until I thought I would scream. When I tried to put a name to what I felt for him nothing seemed appropriate. I knew that I physically desired him but did I love him? And what exactly did he feel for me? Throughout his speech he had never once used the word love to describe how he felt. Was it purely physical for him? How long could desire last without love? But the way he had looked at me when he had knelt at my feet flashed in my head. No, I knew it was not just lust that drove him to pursue me so single mindedly.

I groaned and buried my head in my pillow. I wanted my old life back. I wanted the old me back. I longed for the days when I owned all my own thoughts and my body did not betray me so



traitorously. The hunger that Anakin had awakened in me was going to burn me alive, I was convinced of it. With that last troubling thought I finally managed to drift into a restless sleep.

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Anakin was already on the balcony when I awoke. He stood with his back to me, hands clasped behind him and legs positioned in a wide stance. I took a few tentative steps towards him before realizing that he was immersed in his Jedi meditations. I had turned to go when his voice stopped me.

"Don't go."

"I do not wish to disturb you."

"Your presence is soothing."

How I wished I could have said the same about his presence regarding my own peace of mind.

"You had another nightmare."

"Jedi don't have nightmares."

"I heard you."

I had heard him cry out sometime in the early morning hours and had gone to his chamber without hesitation. I had witnessed one of his nightmares when we had been on the transport and I knew the state they left him in. But even as I had entered the darkened room and started towards his bed, Anakin's nightmare ended of its own accord and he settled back down into a normal sleep. I was torn between the desire to continue forward to reassure myself that he was indeed all right and the knowledge that to do so would be inviting trouble. Belatedly I remembered I was clad only in a thin nightgown and that I had no idea what, if anything, Anakin wore to bed.

Fire, Padme, you keep playing with fire, my mind whispered warningly. Recognizing the truth of those words I had wisely retreated and returned to my own room.

I came back to the present to hear Anakin telling me that he had to go to Tatooine to make sure his mother was all right. My heart turned over in my chest. I did not know exactly when it had happened but being with Anakin had become as essential to my survival as air and water.

I could not let him go alone. I could not risk his being censured by the Council for disobeying his mandate to protect me. Nor could I bear to see him in so much pain. His mother was all the family he had left.

It never occurred to me that time apart would have allowed me to gain some distance and perspective on my tumultuous feelings.

Or did Anakin still have the presence of mind to continue to exert his growing influence over me even in the depths of his despair?

## Chapter 6: Succumb 6

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***"O Rose, thou are sick,  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,  
Hast found thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy."***

***William Blake***

Anakin was gone. Seconds after Cliegg Lars delivered the devastating news of Shmi's abduction by a band of Tusken Raiders, Anakin had left the table declaring his intention of going to find her on his own. I found him above ground standing immobile in the dying rays of Tatooine's twin suns. The pain on his face was heartbreaking to behold.

It was then that it struck me like a blow to the stomach. Oh gods, he had done it. Anakin had succeeded in his campaign. I was in love with him.

I closed my eyes for a brief moment as the realization swept over me.

I was disturbed to find that I could not pinpoint why I loved him. I could not name specific traits about him that had come together to capture my love. It was as if the very idea of loving Anakin had been planted in my mind with no information to support it, like an incomplete thought. I paid no heed to the tiny but persistent voice that told me there was a reason for this; that my own true feelings had been manipulated and changed against my will.

It did not matter then and it does not matter now. It was already too late to go back to that time when my thoughts and feelings had been my sole property. I was finding it more and more difficult to tell where I ended and Anakin began.

Call it an unbreakable bond. Call it a prison. The irrevocable truth was that I belonged to Anakin Skywalker. I always had. I always will.

I did not dare to speak the words. Our situations had not changed. He was still a Jedi in training and I was still a senator. Admitting my love for him, especially now, would only make the inevitable parting that much more painful. For part we surely must.

Telling myself that Anakin must never know, I buried my discovery down deep, determined to never utter those words to him. I would not allow myself to be responsible for destroying his life as a Jedi.

I stood facing him, our shadows cast against the baked earthen walls of the farmstead, his face a study in pain and anguish. I wished then for the ability to take Anakin's pain inside of me. I wanted to make everything bad that had ever happened to him go away. I wanted to fix whatever was broken inside of Anakin and make him whole again. I wanted ... Anakin.

All these thoughts and more raced through my mind making me feel dizzy. Not being able to tell him that I loved him was a bitter pill to swallow.

Throwing all thoughts of decorum aside I threw my arms around his neck and cried out his name. It was his turn to be taken back as he felt the desperation and sorrow in my embrace. I buried my face in his neck and inhaled his musky scent, barely refraining from placing a kiss against his heated skin. I only dimly registered Anakin's words telling me to stay with the Lars until he returned. Too soon he disengaged and moved away, a promise on his lips.

"I won't be long."

Then he was gone and I was deathly afraid. My knees buckled and I sat down where I stood, my arms wrapping protectively around my body. I was chilled to the bone in that hot desert wind for I had realized something horrible.

I was not afraid that Anakin would fail to return but rather that he would.

\*\*\*\*

"I-I killed them. I killed them all. They're dead. Every single one of them."

Anakin swung back around to look directly at me, his face a mask of rage and guilt. Unshed tears glimmered in his feral eyes as he moved towards me.

"And not just the men but the women and the children. They're like animals! And I slaughtered them like animals. I hate them!"

Sour bile rose up in my throat as I listened to Anakin. I could not take my eyes away from those haunted blue eyes. The roaring in my ears grew louder and I had to steady myself by grabbing the nearest hard surface to avoid crumpling to the floor.

Shmi was dead. She had been tortured to death by the group of Tusken Raiders that Anakin had then killed.

"...the women and the children."

Anakin's words reverberated in my head. What had happened out in the desert? What had happened to Anakin?

His eyes were wild. In the dim light of the garage they had changed from blue to black. I shut my eyes and fought off a sudden wave of nausea. When I opened them again it was to find Anakin watching me with rabid desperation. He looked at me as if I were his last hope.

Numbly I watched as he all but collapsed at my feet, burying his head in his arms. I felt completely helpless against the forces that had driven Anakin to kill without mercy. I looked down at his bent head and his quivering shoulders. I could not reconcile the Anakin I knew with the person who had just wiped out an entire group of sentient beings.

I sank down to join him on the floor and cautiously reached out to him. He leaned into me, his eyes begging for my forgiveness, my understanding, my help. I almost backed away from him then. He wanted too much from me. He wanted something that I had no power to bestow -

absolution. I was struck by an illogical fear that, should I accept him into my arms, his crime would become mine.

Anakin sensed my hesitation and the childlike bewilderment that radiated off of him was my undoing. Without a second thought I wrapped my arms around him and drew his head down to lie upon my breast. His arms stole around my back, squeezing so tight I thought my ribs would surely crack. I murmured soothing but meaningless words into his hair as I pressed my cheek against his bowed head, swaying back and forth in an endless but comforting rhythm.

\*\*\*\*

The suns had set long ago but I had no sense of time passing. I could have been rocking Anakin within the circle of my arms for hours or days. It did not matter. I cradled him to me as he mourned for his beloved mother, lamenting anew that he had not been in time to save her. I listened without really hearing as he cried for himself and for the terrible thing that he had done.

My body grew stiff and cold and still I rocked him.

Eventually his sobs faded away into nothingness and he relaxed limply against me. The sound of his slow and steady breathing kept time with the motion of my body as I mechanically stroked his hair and hummed a long forgotten Naboo lullaby from a childhood that was far behind me.

I stared sightlessly across the darkened garage that stank of oil and grime and wondered what I was going to do.

I felt everything.

I felt nothing.

---

***"Teach me how to repent; for that's as good  
As if thou hadst sealed my pardon, with thy blood."***

***John Donne***

Another dream.

Firm lips pressed against mine, light and warm. The soft brush of fingertips against my cheek.

I floated somewhere between sleep and consciousness, enjoying the remnants of that pleasant dream. I was reluctant to open my eyes and leave that peaceful world but the fog of sleep was already beginning to lift. Gradually I became aware that I was not lying in my bed but in strong arms against a heated body. I could feel slick leather beneath one cheek and the rise and fall of someone's breathing.

Anakin.

Or was I still dreaming?

My eyelids fluttered opened languidly to find Anakin's face just above mine. My lips still held the

warm tingle from the kiss that had invaded my dreams.

Blue eyes met mine.

The lost look was still there amid the pain and sadness and my heart ached for him. Yet it was an oddly peaceful moment that we shared and I marveled at the feeling of rightness that came with being in his arms. But still, underlying that feeling of coming home was that sense that things were not quite right.

Anakin gently brushed a lock of hair back from my brow and then bent to kiss me again.

The second kiss was different. His lips were more insistent upon mine, more urgent this time. Still a bit sleep muddled I did not object and tentatively responded. Anakin immediately deepened the kiss, using his tongue to gently part my lips and slip inside. I sighed as a pleasurable heat spread through my body.

I might never have pulled away from him had I not heard him inside my head.

//Let me love you, Padme//

My eyes flew open and I broke away from his persuasive kiss and invasive thoughts. The events of the evening came flooding back and I squirmed out of his embrace and clamored to my feet.

"Anakin, no. I-I am sorry. We can not.... I can not." I finished helplessly.

Anakin rose to his feet slowly and deliberately. His expression was one of annoyance and impatience. It was the face he displayed whenever he did not get his way, when his plans were thwarted.

Ignoring my words, Anakin reached for me and I pulled back sharply.

"No!" I yelled more forcibly, keeping my distance as I watched him warily.

I had to make him understand that I meant what I had said.

Anakin scowled at me but did not attempt to move towards me again. His stillness and silent watchfulness made me uneasy and I rushed to remind him of our last conversation on the subject.

"We have discussed this already. It is not possible for us. We agreed." I said in an unintentional condescending manner that made me cringe inwardly.

It occurred to me then that I was trying to remind myself as well as Anakin. Perhaps I thought if I said it often enough I would start to believe it myself.

Anakin's eyes flashed fire at my words and tone. I remembered that look. It had been there when Sio Bibble had addressed him as Master Jedi and I had interjected that he was still a Padawan learner. It had grown stronger when I had not consulted Anakin prior to choosing the Lake District retreat as a safe haven. It was a look that said I was against him too, that I was allied with the Council and Obi Wan; the very people he felt were holding him back by not

allowing him to take the trials. Anakin did not like to be told what to do and he resented being considered a child.

I jumped as the untouched tray of food that I had brought him earlier lifted up from its resting place and flew across the room, smashing against the far wall. Anakin's attention turned to the workbench next. He made a sweeping gesture with his hand and I watched in astonishment as a jumbled pile of parts and tools hurtled through the air. I covered my ears against the deafening noise as the flying parts rained down atop some metal sheeting stacked at the base of the wall.

I tore my attention away from the mess to stare at Anakin in disbelief. He stood with his back to me, body ridged with tension, fists clenching and unclenching, struggling to get himself under control.

I had always known that he had a bad temper. In fact I had suspected that part of his problems with Obi Wan and the Council stemmed from their concerns over Anakin's battle to control his anger. But actually witnessing the manifestation of Anakin's rage was a frightening revelation. I had never seen him, or anyone for that matter, lose control like he just had. And I certainly had never expected him to use the Force to fling objects about in what amounted to a childish temper tantrum.

No sooner had that thought formed in my mind than Anakin was swinging around to focus all of his angry attention on me. The breath caught in my throat in sudden awareness and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. Oh gods, he had heard me!

I heard his horrifying words once more.

"Not just the men but the women and the children."

All my instincts were screaming at me to get out fast. But it quickly became obvious that getting out might not be possible. When the food tray had taken flight moments earlier, I had moved away from the doorway, the only exit from the garage. Now I found that to get to the door I would have to get by Anakin.

I started to move forward but Anakin read my intentions and stepped quickly to the side, effectively barring my path. Nervous panic set in and immediately I lunged in the other direction only to be met with the same results. With each block, Anakin maneuvered me back deeper into dim recesses of the garage. A taunting smile hovered on his lips as he stared down at me with cold eyes.

Abruptly the smile faded and his face grew severe as he considered me with narrowed eyes.

"Childish? You think me childish, Padme? He asked me in a tone that thrummed with hostile intent.

Damn his Jedi powers!

I backed away from him, my eyes never leaving his face. It occurred to me then that Anakin's feelings for me would not protect me from his wrath. I shook my head silently in response to his chilling question and kept backing away.

Anakin advanced towards me menacingly, fixing me with his predatory gaze, using his height to

intimidate. My retreat was cut short when my back met wall. Anakin had literally backed me into a corner.

He smiled coldly at the expression on my face as my predicament dawned on me. Anakin actually seemed to be enjoying my growing distress.

That smile worried me more far more than I was willing to acknowledge.

Towering over me, Anakin leisurely ran an insolent finger from my temple to my jaw, ignoring the trembling of my body. He watched me with mock concern for a long moment before grasping my chin with punishing fingers. Anakin bent slowly closer, drawing out the tension until my nerves were strung taut.

"Tell me, milady," he spat the courtesy title contemptuously. "Did you find me childish when I made you moan and sigh beneath me?"

I flinched visibly at that humiliating question, flushing red with embarrassment. To have my intimate and innocent responses to his lovemaking mocked and cruelly thrown back in my face wounded me deeply. Perhaps Anakin was unaware of how foolish a woman's heart could be for I had cherished the memory of that afternoon in the meadow. Despite the way it had ended with my panicked flight, it had been my first unforgettable taste of passion and Anakin had been the one to introduce me to it. The fact that we had agreed to never let it happen again had made the memory all the more precious, especially after I admitted to myself that I loved him. Now with a few callous words he had taken that memory and turned it into something sordid and dirty.

"Anakin .... "

"Shhh." Shushing me as if I were a child caught speaking out of turn.

I stared mutely into his hot gaze as he lightly ran his thumb over my bottom lip. That burning touch seemed to threaten something and a tremor ran through my body.

I yelped in surprise when he released my chin and abruptly shoved me back so that I was compressed between the two adjoining walls behind me. He squeezed my shoulders a little too hard for comfort and I winced in pain. Fear had finally taken me completely over and I fought to blink back the unwanted tears that were threatening to fall.

"Anakin, stop ... let me go." I practically pleaded.

He was not listening.

Despite my best efforts, a single traitorous tear managed to escape to roll down my face. Anakin's searing gaze followed the tear's descent with a lurid fascination before he slowly leaned in to catch the salty drop with the tip of his tongue. Then he tilted his head back and closed his eyes as if he was savoring the taste of my fear.

I swallowed hard at the unexpectedly erotic act and a shudder rippled through me. When he lowered his face back to mine I found myself coming forward to meet him as his tongue delicately traced the tear's path up the curve of my cheek. I sighed shakily at the feel of his tongue as it rasped sensuously against my skin.

My resolve was weakening.

"Let me love you." He whispered huskily against my ear, rubbing his roughened cheek against mine.

The words were spoken out loud for which I was almost pathetically grateful.

Anakin was tracing delicate patterns with his fingers over my shoulders and down my back as he waited for me to respond. I never knew that so light a touch could feel so completely wonderful. When his hands slipped up to cup my breasts through my tunic I whimpered softly and leaned into his touch.

His words, his touch, his nearness were causing my insides to churn. I wanted Anakin so badly it was like a physical pain. Summoning the emotional strength to keep up my resistance was impossible and with a sigh of defeat I let my head fall forward to rest against him.

Anakin nuzzled his face against mine with growing need, the light stubble rasping pleurably against my skin. His hot, moist breath moved against my ear and then his warm tongue quickly followed. As he alternated between tracing the contours and darting his tongue inside, I shuddered against him. With a groan Anakin pulled me up hard against his body.

I offered no resistance when his lips found mine. He kissed me deeply, leaving no part of my mouth or tongue untouched. I gasped as my bones turned to liquid and I clutched at his shoulders, grabbing hold of his leather tunic in a futile attempt to anchor myself. He responded by running his hands down my back and pulling me even closer, molding me to his body. With his encouraging nudges and licks my head fell back, exposing the vulnerable column of my neck to his hungry mouth.

I was losing all sense of myself and my surroundings as Anakin's lips slid down my neck. Teeth scraped against flesh, lips kissed and sucked with the intent to mark. All I was aware of were the new and intense sensations that Anakin's tongue and teeth were sparking. His arms tightened around me as he made his way back up my neck, licking and biting until I could not stop the mewling cries of pleasure that emanated from me. The lips at my throat stopped their exquisite explorations and I opened my eyes in confusion, unsure as to what had happened.

Anakin was studying my face intently, almost clinically. Whatever he saw reflected there seemed to both amuse and please him at once. A twisted smile full of self-satisfaction and arrogance suddenly curled his lips.

It was like being doused with ice water. With dawning humiliation I saw that there was no warmth in his eyes, just cold calculation. He had been angry at me for refusing him and he had set out to prove that my objections could be easily overcome.

I stiffened in humiliation as he continued to leisurely study my flushed face. He was looking at me as if I were the subject of some twisted sexual experiment he was conducting. The way he had mocked me earlier for my verbal responses to his lovemaking came flooding back and I felt sick.

With all the strength I could muster, I pushed him away. To my surprise he released me easily; taking a step back but making sure that I was still effectively trapped.



I was furious at him but even more so at myself. Self-disgust washed over me. I did not understand how he could rouse such a response from my body despite all my mental efforts to resist. I detested my lack of control where Anakin was concerned. Being made to feel weak and easily subjugated was not something I was use to and I resented it deeply.

My anger and embarrassment grew as Anakin continued to watch me with that hateful detached air, as if I meant nothing to him. Tossing my head defiantly I narrowed my eyes at the arrogant Jedi before me. I was determined to show him, and myself, that he could not intimidate me any longer.

I was a former queen and a current senator and I would not allow this 'boy' to make me doubt everything I believed in any longer. I made the decision to take a stand there and then and take back my mind and body. Love him or not, I would not be treated so contemptuously.

It was a foolish act of defiance. I neglected to take into account the nature of the beast I faced.

"I am not afraid of you, Anakin Skywalker." I snapped with false bravado.

He stared at me a moment, an odd expression flitting across his face. His eyes softened for a split second and then reverted back to dark emptiness.

"You should be, you know." Anakin sighed. "You should be very afraid of me."

There are no words to describe the dead look in his eyes when he issued that warning. The blood drained from my face as I realized that he was right. I was in a situation for which I had no experience in handling. I had no working knowledge of the Force or the temptations of the dark side nor did I have any idea what role either was playing in Anakin's life. I was overwhelmed and felt completely helpless. But most of all I was scared of this new unpredictable Anakin.

I did not know then how prophetic those words would prove to be. How could I have? I certainly did not understand that the warning given did not just refer to that particular moment in time.

Anakin closed the small gap between us with his words still hanging in the air. I panicked, reacting without considering the possible ramifications of my actions.

"No! Do not touch me!" I shouted desperately. Then I slapped him - hard.

Anakin reeled back from the force of my unexpected blow. It was impossible to tell who was more shocked, Anakin or I.

Remorse came sweeping over me even before my hand had fallen away. Violence of that kind was abhorrent to me. Except in the case of self-defense I had never hit another being in anger in my life.

The sickening sound of flesh hitting flesh rang in my ears as my conscious reminded me that Anakin was not himself; that his mother had been brutally beaten and tortured before dying in his arms less than a day ago. I could not have begun to understand the grief he was going through and I had just added to his hurt.

The guilt threatened to choke me.

Anakin rubbed his reddened cheek gingerly as he regarded me with hurt astonishment that was rapidly turning into a simmering fury.

I started to reach out to sooth the sting of the slap, to apologize for striking him. Before I could do either of those things, Anakin sneered at me with a cruel gleam in his blazing eyes.

My apology died on my lips and I took a quick step backwards.

I never even saw him move.

I did not think even a Jedi could move so fast. In a blur of motion, Anakin was suddenly looming over me as he grabbed a handful of my hair. Using his handhold as leverage he forced my head back cruelly, pulling so hard tears sprang to my eyes. At the same time he shifted me to the side so that I was no longer in the corner but pushed hard up against one of the walls. This new location allowed Anakin to press himself fully against me and he took full advantage, grinding his hips into me. I could feel the evidence of his need against my belly.

Not like this, I thought. Please not like this!

I stared up into those empty burning eyes and opened my mouth to scream.

---

***"I feel***

***The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,  
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state  
Mine never shall be parted , bliss or woe."***

***John Milton***

Anakin's hard mouth clamped down on mine and muffled my scream, his tongue ruthlessly forcing its way past my lips. In that initial clash his teeth ground against my lips painfully and I tasted my own blood.

I tried to turn my head away from that assault but Anakin merely tightened his grip, bending my neck so far back I thought it would snap. My cry of pain met the same fate as my scream.

I did not try to move my head away again.

Anakin's free hand roamed at will. I felt his searching touch at my breast, my hip and my thigh before his hand moved down to cup and squeeze my behind roughly. Despite the heat that was radiating from him, Anakin's touch seemed cold and impersonal. My stomach muscles tensed in terror and my heart cried out.

He pressed me against the wall with the weight of his body, taking what he wanted from me. With much effort I managed to work one arm free to push clumsily at his head, my fingers tearing at his hair in an effort to relieve the overwhelming pressure of his mouth upon mine. I pulled with all my might and for a brief moment Anakin's lips left mine. Fierce but dead eyes stared into my terrified face and a spiteful smile touched his lips. With startling speed my hand was yanked away and driven back to impact painfully with the rough wall. Anakin held my wrist pinned to the wall, stretching my body taut. His smile grew a little wider as I winced from the

strain. Then his mouth was crushing mine once more.

Inside my head a voice screamed in protest. Anakin was supposed to be my protector; he had vowed to keep me safe. Instead he was hurting me; frightening me with his anger and strength.

{Gods, please...please stop}

For a split second Anakin's lips stilled as if my internal voice had broken through his rage to find the boy who had long ago told me that he cared for me; the man who had said I was in his very soul. But when his teeth nipped sharply at my lower lip I knew his anger and pain had won out.

I continued to struggle but it was more on principle. Anakin was not only stronger but the way his body was positioned against mine left me virtually immobilized. After a few minutes all I had succeeded in doing was wearing myself out. A wave of exhaustion came over me and all of my energy deserted me at once. My body crumpled and I would have slid down the wall to the ground if not for the pressure of Anakin's body against mine. If he noticed that I was offering no further resistance he gave no sign nor did he relent in his advances.

My scalp burnt from his forceful grip and my neck ached from the unnatural position it was forced to hold. A wave of dizziness swept over me as Anakin stole the very breath from my body. I wondered vaguely if it would make any difference to the outcome if I passed out. I had the horrible feeling that it would not.

Anakin released my wrist from where he had held it pinned so he could resume his exploration of my body. I let it fall listlessly down to my side, too tired and numb to attempt further struggles.

I escaped into my mind then, trying to block out what was happening to my body at the hands of Anakin. Even as my body all but surrendered my thoughts continued to race wildly. In a whirl of color the events of the past ran through my head, coming in and out of focus and in no particular order.

Anakin's knee shoved my legs apart and a strangled cry of fear forced its way past my lips.

Thoughts and images flashed in my mind's eye.

Blue eyes begging me for recognition.

Angry words.

Little Ani.

Lips seeking comfort, seeking submission.

Can't breathe.

Anakin impatiently yanked the neck of my tunic to the side exposing a bare shoulder. I felt his teeth scrape along my collarbone.

The thoughts continued to swirl dizzily in my head.

Pain.

Death.

Torment.

Salvation.

Love.

Love. And then everything fell into place like the intricate pieces of an Alderaani puzzle box. Nothing else mattered. I had finally admitted to myself that I loved Anakin, that I wanted him. So why was I resisting something that both of us wanted and needed so badly? We could not be together indefinitely but we could have this one night.

"No one would have to know. We could keep it a secret."

Anakin was hurting so badly. He was slipping away from me even as he held me crushed against his body. I could not give up on him. And I would not allow him to take me so coldly, so impersonally. If he took me against my will I would hate him and if I hated him he was lost. I knew it deep in my bones. The certainty with which I accepted that truth shook me so hard I thought I really was going to black out. A painful tug at the back of my head kept me from fading into darkness.

For my entire political career I had worked to better my corner of the universe. I had tried to right the wrongs that I saw committed. Now, like so many of the causes I championed, I took it solely upon myself to fix it, to fix Anakin. I would repair the damage done to him by showing him that I loved him. Giving myself to him without the bonds of marriage went against my moral upbringing but I instinctively knew that it was the only way to reach him, to save him. And if it took the breaking of my heart to bring him back, then so be it. What was my heart compared to a soul?

I fought my way out of the lethargic state I had allowed to overtake me and pushed down my fear. Putting aside all that I had been taught, all my reservations, all thoughts of right or wrong, all thoughts of the consequences; I stopped fighting myself and Anakin.

He was mine and I was his.

Opening the floodgates that had held my passion, desire and love in check lifted a weight from my shoulders that I had been all too aware of carrying. In that moment I ceased being a passive victim and became a participant in the fight for Anakin's redemption.

Feelings that I had fought so hard to suppress released themselves as I responded to Anakin's brutish kiss with a hunger of my own. My tongue sought his out, caressing and tasting him. I grabbed at the back of his head with needy hands and encouraged him to kiss me deeper.

My sudden change of heart startled Anakin. He pulled his mouth away from mine and I took that opportunity to pay his neck the same homage that he had earlier paid mine.

Between frenzied kisses and bites I murmured his name, chanting it over and over like a spell to ward off the evil that was threatening to engulf him. When I pulled his leather vest and tunic apart and slid my hands inside to touch his bare chest, Anakin froze. I paused in my ministrations to risk a glance upwards. Anakin was staring down at me dazedly as if he had

never seen me before.

His unwavering gaze made me hesitate, my shyness starting to reassert itself, but I forced myself to carry on. Without breaking eye contact, I reached up to cup his face tenderly before letting my hands run slowly down his body. I marveled at the feel and texture of his warm skin beneath my hands as I caressed his chest and stomach. Anakin stood as if made of stone as I continued to trail my fingers along his torso in further exploration. His ragged breathing was the only sign that my touch was affecting him.

I opened myself to him then and allowed him to read the answering desire and need in my eyes. Anakin's eyes widened and a tremor ran through him but still he did not move.

Hands flat against his chest I leaned in to slowly place an open mouth kiss over his heart. As my tongue tasted his hard flesh, Anakin gasped. Encouraged at his response I boldly ran the tip over his nipple only to find myself grabbed and pushed violently away. He held me at arms length, his fingers digging painfully into my upper arms.

Indecision and confusion warred on his face. His previous anger and contemptuous disregard for me had vanished to be replaced by youthful uncertainty. He vacillated now, torn between his primitive instincts and the code of chivalrous conduct that had been drilled into him over the past ten years by the Jedi.

My heart lightened at the sight. This was the familiar Anakin I saw before me, no longer a forbidding stranger intent on taking his pleasure at my expense.

His eyes bored into mine, searching my face to find an explanation for my sudden change of heart. A silent question hung in the air between us. He was visibly shaking and I knew that the battle within him had not yet been decided. Anakin was using every last ounce of control to keep himself from pulling me to him again.

I watched with bated breath as Anakin grappled with his two opposing sides. The one side that wanted nothing more than to take what I was blatantly offering and the other side that wanted to protect me at all costs- even from himself.

With a shuddering sigh Anakin reached a decision. He dropped his hands so that he was no longer restraining me and moved to the side. I was being given the opportunity to leave if I so chose. Gone were the attempts to arrogantly take what he wanted, to impose his will upon me.

I smiled to myself sadly. That knowledge was bittersweet for it was too late for such considerations now. However I had arrived at my present state of mind and heart, the changes that he had wrought within me were permanent. I could no more have stopped wanting and loving him then than I can today. It would have been easier to stop the twin suns from rising.

Anakin shoulders slumped dejectedly as he waited for me to walk away from him. Just a few hours earlier I might have been able to take that walk of freedom - but not then. We were as one in spirit and I needed for us to be one in the flesh as well. At that moment in time I was sure that no force in the universe could ever tear us apart.

"Padme?" Anakin breathed questioningly when he saw that I remained still, neither moving away from him nor moving closer.

I did not voice a response. Instead, with trembling hands, I reached down to pull Beru's borrowed knitted tunic over my head. I let it fall carelessly to the dirty floor without a thought. I knew that I should have felt guilty for treating someone else's property so poorly but I found that I did not care. Nothing else was important to me anymore. Nothing else except the thought of Anakin over me, inside me, loving me.

I shivered as I stood before him, my thin camisole top doing little to ward off the cold desert night air. His eyes had followed my every movement and now they darkened at the sight of my scantily clad breasts. Shyness once again reared its ugly head as his hot gaze swept voraciously over my curves.

He swallowed visibly, not meeting my eyes. Then Anakin turned sharply away from me and I found myself staring at his tension riddled back.

"Leave me." Anakin said gruffly. "Go to the ship where you'll be safe and I'll - I'll see you in the morning."

"I am not leaving you." I said firmly.

Anakin's shoulders shook.

"Padme, you don't know what you're doing." Angry desperation filled his voice.

"Yes, I do. I need you."

I reached out to run my hand up his back enticingly. At my touch he spun around, exhaling violently, his jaw rigid as he tried to remain in control.

I knew that I could not do what he asked. I could not walk away and leave him to the dark. Gathering my courage, I grasped one of his hands and brought it up to lie flat against my chest, directly over my heart. I shivered at his warm touch upon my cold skin.

Anakin stared at where his hand lay trapped beneath mine as if transfixed.

"Anakin?"

His gaze flew up to meet mine. For a long moment, I looked up into those tortured blue eyes that still glowed with a feverish desire. Then I pulled his hand up to place a kiss into his palm and pressed it to my cheek. Anakin's eyes remained glued to mine.

"Anakin .... I need you to make me complete." I finished in a slow whisper; unknowingly echoing the words of his dying mother.

A harsh intake of breath sounded and then there was no more hesitation. A deep growl rumbled from the back of Anakin's throat as he pulled me to him brusquely, his demanding lips devouring mine. He sank to his knees and pulled me roughly down with him.

In the one concession that he would make to my comfort, Anakin spread Beru's discarded tunic on the ground before laying me down and rolling me beneath him.

There was no time for tenderness. His need for me was overpowering and my desire quickly

rose to match his. I found that his roughness aroused me to the point of madness. I reveled in the sound and feel of ripping fabric under his impatient hands, naked flesh sliding against naked flesh, and the possessive growls rumbling in the back of his throat.

Anakin grabbed the neckline of my camisole with greedy hands, wrenching it from my body. I cried out as friction from the straps burnt the skin on my shoulders. His breathing grew ragged as his wild eyes feasted on the sight of my exposed breasts. I whimpered as warm hands covered my breasts, roughly caressing them with callused palms. When his mouth descended to lave them with his tongue my back arched up and I cried out his name as something white-hot broke within me.

Anakin stroked my thighs through the tattered remains of my skirt before the last remaining barrier between us was ripped away. Wet heat met his searching fingers and he moaned against my breast as he felt the proof of my readiness. When he roughly spread my thighs apart an involuntary cry escaped me and I dug my fingernails into the muscles of his back in anticipation of what was coming next.

There was no consideration for my untried body, save for an agonized groan of apology seconds before he thrust in to me. Anakin's hot mouth swallowed the cry of pain that might have brought the unwanted intervention of a well meaning member of the Lars family.

I screwed my eyes shut and tightened my grip on Anakin's slick back. I welcomed the pain that seared through me before fading to a dull ache. I wanted to believe that I had somehow succeeded in my earlier wish to take Anakin's pain as my own.

My breath came in short, harsh pants that mixed with the animalistic noises Anakin was making. I whimpered as he forced my legs further apart, straining untried muscles.

"Look at me, Padme." His voice was rough and commanding. "Look at me."

My eyes flew open at the demanding tone that brooked no arguments. Anakin's hard blue eyes held mine in a fierce gaze as he continued to plunge again and again into my battered body. His pace increased, each stroke now being accompanied by the same word echoing over and over in my head.

//Mine. Mine. Mine. Mine//

My eyes widened, concerned anew at the intensity of his feelings. Anakin's possessiveness frightened and exited me all at once. He was staking his claim on my body, telling me that I was his and his alone. I swallowed hard at the implications of that one little word before surrendering to Anakin's will.

I answered him through kiss swollen lips, affirming for all times his ownership of my body and my soul.

"Yours, Anakin, always yours."

Triumph sparked in Anakin's eyes at my declaration.

"Never forget that, Padme." He warned breathlessly.

Then Anakin swooped down to capture my mouth in a hard kiss that sealed our vows and left me gasping for air.

Sand and sharp stones scattered on the garage floor bit into my tender flesh. The force of Anakin's thrusting pushed my body further off the tunic leaving just my lower back and behind marginally protected. He tightened his grip on my hips and the sound of his flesh pounding into mine mingled with my soft cries and his low moans of pleasure.

This was for him - all of it. I did not care that we were making love on the filthy floor of a garage without even the most basic of comforts. It did not matter that he had taken me in one hard thrust that tore through my maidenhead with an agonizing rip. I wanted his savage love making. I needed it to wipe out the memory of what he had done and what he had almost done. I needed to be possessed by Anakin, to have his brand stamped on my body. I was driven to keep him from slipping away and succumbing to that darkness that dwells within us all but truly manifests itself in only a few.

Anakin leaned over me, supporting himself on his arms, and drove himself deeper. My hips rose instinctively to meet his in a rhythm as old as the universe. I threw back my head and dug my nails into Anakin's taut biceps. A harsh groan rumbled from his chest and he let out a shuddering cry before calling my name over and over. Deep within my body I felt his hot seed explode into my waiting warmth. His mouth covered mine in a desperate kiss as he continued to pump into me. Then, when he was completely spent, Anakin collapsed on top of me and buried his face in the hollow of my neck.

I stroked his trembling back, my hands gliding over glistening skin. Our bodies were glued together with our sweat and his essence. Anakin tenderly lapped at the moisture beading my chest and neck with his tongue. Eventually his lips made their way to mine and he kissed me slow and deep. My hands found their way to his damp hair where I wound his Padawan braid around one finger.

When our lips finally parted, Anakin looked deep into my eyes and smiled. His face was filled with wonder as if he could not believe what had just happened. He gently stroked the side of my face, pushing back stray strands of damp hair from my forehead.

Although he used no words, I felt the love radiating from him and I basked in the warmth. I returned the smile shyly and then he bent back down to continue that kiss that spoke of love, adoration and regret at having caused me pain.

We stayed like that for a long while, content to just hold each other in silence and exchange soft kisses and tender caresses.

The darkness within him had abated and I feverishly prayed that he would never give into it again.

Later, long after Anakin had covered us with his Jedi robe and fallen asleep, I lay trembling in his arms with my head pillowed on his chest. I felt the rise and fall of his steady breathing beneath my head and I listened to the beat of his heart as it tried to sing me to sleep.

It was then that I finally cried.



## Chapter 7: Succumb 7

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*"Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire."*

**Robert Frost**

One night I had told myself.

One night to bring Anakin back from the edge of the black abyss above which he had so precariously balanced. One night to experience passion in the arms of the only man that I would ever love. One night that I swore could never, would never, be repeated.

Even as I had lain on the floor in Anakin's arms I had known the truth. Anakin would never be satisfied with that one night. By giving myself to him then I had given my consent to be his and his alone; always and forever.

I had made a vow on Tatooine to never tell Anakin that I loved him. I told myself that if I never said the words out loud I would be safe. Withholding the truth about my feelings was my only chance, albeit a small one, to get him to see reason and accept that a future for us was impossible. It was also my only chance to go back to some semblance of my old life. That it would be an empty and lonely life without Anakin was something too painful to dwell upon.

Any hope of doing either died a swift death when I made that fateful miscalculation. Awaiting our certain fate, I had given into temptation and had told Anakin how I felt.

Strange how things work out, is it not? For we of course did not die that day on Geonosis. Sometimes, in my heart of hearts, I think it would have been better if we had.

So it was my fault really. Oh, I have no doubt that Anakin would have continued to pursue me even had I not confessed my true feelings. But once I let those damning words out, the very words that he had wanted to hear for so long, there was no going back. Armed with the irrefutable truth, Anakin was more determined than ever to do whatever it took to tie me to him forever.

All my life I had been trained to always do what was right, to be strong and reliable. But I had grown tired of always being the solid and dependable one. The urge to think of myself first, just for a little while, grew stronger everyday that I was in Anakin's company. My natural reticence held me back, kept me from plummeting down that steep path into Anakin's arms for as long as possible. But each day Anakin continued to knock down my defensive walls, one brick at a time. In the end, I stood at the top of that path swaying with indecision and fear until I was too exhausted to know right from wrong any longer. The black swirling chasm beckoned me, promising me love and desire if only I would surrender and in a moment of weakness I did.

It was no ordinary fall for Padme Naberrie, for when I finally fell; I fell spectacularly.

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***"Know that love is a careless child  
And forgets promise past;  
He is blind, he is deaf when he list  
And in faith never fast."***

***Anonymous***

The battle on Geonosis was over. The dead had been collected and counted and the wounded were evacuated to the makeshift medical facilities on the newly christened 'Coruscant's Pride', one of the Republic military assault ships stationed above the red planet.

The Clone War had begun.

Anakin and I were confined to Coruscant's Pride for the nine days it took the newly created Republic military to finish their clearing operations and for the remaining Jedi to conclude their investigation into Count Dooku's Separatist movement and their connection with the Geonosians.

Obi Wan's wounds were serious but did not take long to heal once the bacta treatment was completed. Anakin, on the other hand, took almost four days, two of which were spent in a deep Jedi healing trance. In the end he had lost most of his right arm to Count Dooku and had been fitted with a temporary metal arm while he had been unconscious. My own wounds, courtesy of the nexu, were barely more than faint scratch marks by the end of the second day. The medical droid had assured me that even those would disappear within a week.

For the four days of Anakin's recovery, I divided my time between the ship's library and his bedside in the sickbay. Obi Wan did not approve.

I have no proof but I am sure it was Obi Wan who made sure that I was never alone with his Padawan during my visits. If Obi Wan were not already present upon my arrival to the medical center then he was sure to show up within minutes. On the occasions when he was unable to be present the sudden nearby attendance of several medical droids and human technicians hovering within earshot did the job. The situation was not lost on Anakin and he chaffed at the lack of privacy. I, on the other hand, was secretly grateful for the reprieve that Obi Wan unwittingly gave me.

But despite Obi Wan's best efforts, Anakin found ways to circumvent the "guard dogs" as he called them. When backs were turned he would shoot me glances that would turn my insides to liquid and cause me to shift uncomfortably in my seat. But far worse were the wicked and suggestive things that he would whisper in my head. As long as Obi Wan was not present I was subjected to a constant barrage of Force thoughts from Anakin; full of the decadent things he wanted to do to me and what he wanted me to do to him. It never failed that when I left his side my face was flushed a bright red and my body was quivering with barely suppressed desire and shame.

Upon boarding, I had been scrupulous in my efforts to act the professional politician at all times, especially when I could be observed around Anakin. I was determined to keep what had happened between us a secret from everyone, especially Obi Wan. Having been witnesses to my treatment of Anakin in the hangar, I knew that it was up to me to allay any concerns he or

Master Yoda might have.

Anakin had made his disapproval of my cool demeanor known and his eyes silently promised unmistakable retribution once he was released. With a sinking heart, I knew that going through with my decision to go our separate ways was not going to be something that he acquiesced to without a fight. My only hope was that our enforced stay would end soon and we could be on our way.

I had hoped that Obi Wan's presence aboard the ship would prove an adequate shield until we either departed for Coruscant or I went home to Naboo. What I had not counted on was being so convincing in my performance that Obi Wan would be reassured enough to leave the ship and allow Anakin to reassume the role of my protector. Without knowing it, the Jedi Master played straight into the Padawan's hands - and I could do nothing to stop it.

Obi Wan searched me out early the fourth day to inform me that Anakin was scheduled to be released late that afternoon. I had been working in the ship's library, viewing the latest news from Coruscant on the HoloNet and had nodded absently.

My act as a preoccupied senator was going so well that it took a full minute for what Obi Wan was saying to register. Turning to face him for the first time, I broke character and looked at him with barely disguised apprehension. He was leaving for the surface to help with the investigation and upon his departure Anakin would be taking up residence in the cabin that Obi Wan would be vacating.

For the first time I found myself regretting being accorded those particular quarters. The ship's commander had been uncomfortable with my presence from the moment I came onboard. Not only was I a civilian and a politician but, worse, I was also female and he did not want me mixing with his crew or officers any more than absolutely necessary. Obi Wan had his own concerns about my general safety and the two men had decided that the stateroom reserved for visiting dignitaries would be an acceptable solution.

At the time I had been grateful for the courtesy and had been quite content with the surprisingly spacious cabin and its adjoining private dining room and small lounge. But now I was faced with sharing the space with Anakin and, unless I was prepared to tell Obi Wan all that had transpired, there was absolutely nothing I could do about it.

I swallowed the panic threatening to rise to the surface. The one person who might be able to stop his Padawan in his relentless pursuit was leaving us, for all intents and purposes, alone. I was not even to be afforded the buffer of Artoo or Threepio for they had remained on Geonosis to help the victors wherever they could.

"Senator Amidala? Milady, is there something the matter?"

My attention returned to Obi Wan with a snap. I murmured a hasty apology, blaming the distractions of my workload for my lack of attention. The weak excuse was met with silence and I shifted uncomfortably as Obi Wan studied me with that inscrutable expression of his. I do not know whether he believed me or if he just chose to overlook it due to his preoccupation with his impending departure. After a long moment he had merely nodded thoughtfully and continued on.

"I've made arrangements to have your wardrobe transferred up from your ship."

Obi Wan's unexpected consideration for my creature comfort caught me by surprise until I realized the motive behind it. The disapproving gaze that flickered over my clean but tattered attire was not missed and I self-consciously fingered the frayed edge of what now amounted to my top. With no other options, I had had no choice but to wear the same outfit I had been wearing since departing Tatooine for Geonosis. Obi Wan's sudden concern with the state of my dress was not based on consideration but rather it was in direct response to the amount of attention Anakin had paid to my bared mid-drift during my visits. On several occasions Anakin had made it fairly obvious that the amount of flesh being displayed was infinitely more interesting than conversations with his Master. Obi Wan had not commented on his charge's inappropriate behavior but he had obviously not missed the cause.

I looked up to meet Obi Wan's gaze and for a fraction of a second I fancied that something else besides disapproval hovered in those serene green eyes. Then he blinked and whatever it was that I thought I saw was gone. When I looked again his expression was nothing but polite indifference, leaving me with the impression that I had imagined the whole thing.

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True to his word, within an hour of Obi Wan's departure my wardrobe had been retrieved from my stranded ship and delivered to my quarters. Although I was amused that he had not wasted any time, I was also very grateful to be able to throw the ruined outfit away and put on a more concealing dress. Clones or not, they had reacted in much the same way as Anakin had done and I suspected that was a secondary reason for Obi Wan's haste.

I changed into one of my more simple gowns and then addressed the problem of my hair. Wishing for the hundredth time that Dorm was with me, I settled for dressing it simply and pinned it up in a loose twist. Exasperated as several curling tendrils refused to stay put, I finally gave up and decided to leave it alone rather than starting all over again. I nervously smoothed an imaginary crease from my dress as I checked my appearance in the mirror one last time.

The reflection that stared back at me was unfamiliar to me. My eyes were shadowed with worry and I thought that I looked paler than usual. Not surprising considering that my nerves were strung tight and I had not slept well since meeting Anakin again.

I glanced at the chronometer anxiously. Anakin would be released in time for dinner and though that was hours away, I was already an emotional wreck. I could not stop worrying about how I was going to handle that impossible situation. It would be the first time since we had left to rescue Obi Wan that we were truly alone. Would he expect to just pick up where we had left off now that he knew without a doubt my true feelings for him? Would he expect to share my bed?

There had been no time to discuss what had passed between us that night on Tatooine. The vow of just one night had been mine, not his, I remembered guiltily. We had been together as only husband and wife should and I had since foolishly told him that I loved him. Now I was going to have to reiterate that we must go our separate ways. I refused to acknowledge to myself how completely unrealistic I was being by actually expecting him to not only revert to the way things were when we had departed Naboo but to be happy about it.

## **Chapter 8: Succumb 8**

**Auhor's Note:** The language spoken by Anakin is entirely made up. I based it on the fact that Shmi had a pronounced accent that said to me Basic wasn't her first language. There is no translation - I've left it up to the reader's imagination. If any word actually means something in some language, it's entirely coincidental.

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***"He loves to sit and hear me sing,  
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;  
Then stretches out my golden wing,  
And mocks my loss of liberty."***

***William Blake***

He wanted to marry me.

I sat in stunned disbelief across the dining table from Anakin. He did not ask if I wanted to be his wife. Instead he nonchalantly announced that we would get married as soon as it could be arranged. There was no hesitancy in his attitude, no uncertainty in his words, just steely determination.

In all the times I had imagined what Anakin would say once he had me alone again, I never imagined that it would be about marriage. Being lovers would have been bad enough in the eyes of the Jedi, not to mention my family, but marriage? Unexpected bitterness filled my heart. The Jedi would never allow their Chosen One to break the all important Jedi Code.

I stared down at my plate of food with something akin to revulsion. The once appetizing smell was making me feel decidedly queasy and I pushed the plate away quickly before I embarrassed myself.

A rising tide of hysteria was threatening to engulf me and I had a momentary thought of throwing caution to the wind and enlisting Obi Wan's help in dissuading Anakin. There would be no need to mention what had happened in the garage on Tatooine. It would be a simple request from a senator to a Jedi Master asking for his assistance in curtailing his Padawan's youthful infatuation.

My hand that had been resting atop the table was swiftly seized in a vise-like grip and I whipped my head up to meet Anakin's angry eyes.

"Don't, Padme." He warned. "Don't."

I swallowed hard as his hold tightened and I could not hide the wince of pain that flashed across my face. Anakin frowned, looking down at the hand that imprisoned my wrist as if noticing for the first time what he was doing. Almost immediately he loosened his grip, his fingers massaging the circulation back into my hand.

I looked away guiltily. He had to know that I would never go to Obi Wan for help. If I were to tell his Master about the two of us, I might as well march into the Jedi Temple and inform the Council myself. I pulled my hand away from his as my mind raced for an argument that would bring Anakin to his senses.

It proved to be a futile effort.

Anakin would simply not listen to reason. None of the arguments that I presented swayed him from the insane course of action he was intent upon. When I told him that the Council would never allow him to marry, he echoed the suggestion he had made in front of the fire at the retreat on Naboo.

"They won't object if they don't know about it."

Secrets! Lies! I could not live that way.

Anakin watched me with that intense gaze of his as I stood abruptly and began to pace the length of the dinning room. The muscles in my back and neck were tight with tension and I knew I was working myself up into one of my rare tempers. I came to halt when Anakin broke the deafening silence.

"You said you loved me. Was that a lie?" His voice was cold but I could hear the underlying hurt.

"You know it was not." I said with my back to him.

With that irritating Jedi stealth he was suddenly behind me. I jumped as Anakin's arms wrapped around me and he pulled me back against his chest. His shiny metal appendage was cold against my skin and I could not help but note how comfortable he already was with it. Anakin rested his chin atop my head and despite myself I started to relax back against him.

"Then we will get married."

Sighing with exasperation, I disengaged myself from his embrace; mildly surprised that he let me go so easily. I turned sharply to face him, my hands resting on my hips, my eyes snapping with impatience.

"No, Anakin."

My words were strong and determined; my expression resolute. Anakin narrowed his eyes at my defiant stance. Annoyance and irritation radiated off of him as he moved closer.

"I won't let you throw what we have away. I won't let you go."

His words struck a chill in my heart. My entire life was spiraling out of control before my very eyes. I was being pushed relentlessly towards a murky future with a man who overwhelmed me at every turn. I loved Anakin, I wanted Anakin and I was frightened of Anakin. The intensity of our feelings for each other was all consuming; like a fire that burns too brightly before being extinguished forever.

A shaky sigh escaped me and I turned away from him again.

"I can't." I muttered under my breath, breaking from the formal speech pattern that had been drummed into me as Princess of Theed. "Please, I can't."

"Padme ... " He started in a conciliatory tone.

"Anakin, no!"

Deciding discretion was the better part of valor I turned and headed for the door.

"Where do you think you're going?" Anakin demanded irritably.

Scooping up my data pad from the side table, I looked back at him over my shoulder.

"I cannot discuss this anymore, Anakin. I will be in the library catching up on my senatorial duties. I suggest you spend some time remembering that you have your own obligations to uphold."

My tone was sharper than I intended but my nerves were frazzled and I could not help myself. An angry sneer sounded behind me.

"This isn't over, Senator," Anakin said, emphasizing my title. "It's far from over."

Those worrisome words resounded in my head long after the door had slid shut behind me. Issuing a challenge to Anakin was always a mistake.

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Three hours in front of the HoloNet had given me nothing more than eye strain and a stiff neck. Turning the screen off, I laid my head down in my arms and wondered how much longer I could stand to be in such close quarters with Anakin. He had only been out of the sick bay for a few hours and already I felt that I was under siege. My nerves were stretched to the breaking point.

Anakin had proved to me that I was only fooling myself in thinking that I could handle and control my feelings for him. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought that physical desire could be so powerful that it ruled every aspect of one's life. Who would have thought that my body would crave something that it had done so long without?

I laughed bitterly. Padme Naberrie, so wise to the ways of the galaxy! I had always congratulated myself on being level headed enough to avoid romantic entanglements. How was I to have known that I had only done so because I had not met the man who could breach my defenses so effectively? I had tricked myself into thinking I was immune to mindless passion. Now I appeared to be ruled by it.

I sighed heavily, something I had started to do a lot of, and closed my eyes. I had done nothing constructive and I doubted I ever would as long as Anakin was in close proximity.

The sound of the library door opening startled me and set my teeth immediately on edge. Before I was even aware of doing so, I had stood up and turned around to face the person who had invaded my restless peace. I hoped for an officer who had discovered he needed to do some research for a report or even a clone trooper with a message for me. My heart rate increased dramatically when I saw it was Anakin. Had I really thought it would be anybody else?

The lights suddenly dimmed and the room was suffused in a murky darkness as Anakin stalked towards me like some cloaked marauder bearing down on his intended victim. It was not until he was right in front of me that I was able to see the expression on his face. My mouth went dry and my breath caught as I looked up at him.

Anakin was through talking.

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***"Take me to you, imprison me, for I  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me."***

***John Donne***

I stood there nervously, aware more than ever how isolated we were from the rest of the ship. I cursed myself for giving Anakin the opportunity to corner me in the one place where we were virtually guaranteed complete solitude. In my four days aboard the Coruscant's Pride, I had never seen anyone else in the library; in fact I had never even seen anyone in the general vicinity.

If there had been any remaining hope of a timely interruption it was dashed when I heard the beep-click of the lock as Anakin used the Force to secure the door. My eyes looked wildly from the now locked door back to Anakin's intent face.

"Poor Padme, no more Obi Wan to use as a shield, hmm?" Anakin said with a mocking smile.

My lower back pressed uncomfortably into the edge of the work table behind me as Anakin loomed over me. All my years of experience at political debate and public speaking evaporated as if they never existed and I could only stare up at him with wide eyes.

Anakin bent to place a hand on the table on either side of me, forcing me to lean back or have my face pressed into his chest. My hands grasped the table edge tightly to avoid toppling backwards. Those cobalt blue eyes burned into mine and my heart turned over in my chest.

"Take down your hair." His tone was uneven and husky.

I stared at him mutely as if Basic were a language that I no longer understood. When I made no move to obey his command he repeated himself more forcibly, each word stressed individually.

"Take. Down. Your. Hair."

A quiver of nervous excitement spiraled inside me which I quickly suppressed. I narrowed my eyes at him in resentment but he pretended not to notice.

"Do it or I'll do it myself."

Anakin made as if to follow through with his threat and I flinched back. I hesitated for a second but he read the defeat in my eyes and moved back slightly to give me room to do as he demanded. All the while his hungry eyes never strayed from my face.

My hands shook slightly as they seemed to reach up of their own volition to obey his command. I was rooted to the spot as I pulled one pin after another from my hair. Anakin's gaze glowed with an inner fire that held me spell bound and my chest rose and fell with my increasingly jagged breathing.



When the last pin was removed and my brown curls had tumbled about my shoulders and down my back, Anakin sighed with pleasure; fanning my hair out around my face before leaning back in. Once again I found myself being forced backwards. I tried to brave my way out of that dangerous situation.

"Anakin, I do not have time for this." I said.

I had meant to sound unconcerned but the effect was ruined when my voice came out weak and tremulous.

Anakin snorted with amusement and then with a swiftness that raised a startled cry from me, I was lifted off my feet by invisible hands and set down at the table's edge. Anakin's hands pushed my knees apart swiftly and he settled himself between my thighs.

"We belong together, Padme. Why do you have to fight it?" His voice was low and seductive.

The emotions behind his question were achingly raw and a tremor ran down my spine as I looked up into his handsome face. I had no words with which to respond. The knowledge that he was right, that our fates were intertwined irrevocably, was something that I had fought against ever since I realized that I loved him. Anakin was my other half and I was his. Yet I could not escape the feeling that something terrible awaited us should we choose the wrong path.

//You said you were mine, Padme//

I stiffened in outrage and offense at his mental violation. No one should have that much power, I thought angrily. I hardened my resolve even as my body sent the signals that it wanted to give in and surrender to his will, to his love. My lack of control over my own body and mind angered me.

"Do not do that!"

Anakin flashed me that infuriatingly smug smile that he had perfected. The delight he took in stripping away my habitual cool and poised exterior was palatable. He reveled in knowing he could reduce me to anger or passion - often with no more than a heated look or seductive smile.

I was horrified to find that I wanted nothing more than to give into the anger that he was inspiring and wipe that smirk off his face with the palm of my hand.

"I wouldn't advise it if I were you. Once was quite enough."

I gaped at him; his ability to know what I thought almost before I did was both maddening and frightening. Anakin's arms stole around my back and pulled me up hard against his body. A wicked grin hovered on his lips and then his mouth descended to capture mine.

I defiantly kept my lips clamped tightly shut, resisting the pressure of Anakin's mouth. He lifted his head sharply, all amusement having fled.

"Don't make me hurt you, Padme." He said in a voice that promised retribution should I continue to resist.

When I remained stubbornly silent and continued to glare at him, he sighed in exasperation and shook his head at me as if I were a disobedient child. With surprising gentleness after his threat, Anakin merely pressed his lips lightly against mine once more. His tongue delicately traced the outline of my lips, attempting to coax them apart. But when I still refused to give way he growled in disapproval and bit down hard on my lower lip. An involuntary gasp of pain gave him the opening he had been looking for and instantly his tongue slid inside to ravish my mouth. My cries of protest were swallowed and I struggled to keep my mouth from softening beneath the passionate onslaught.

My pride would not allow me to cede and I squirmed violently, pummeling my fists against his shoulders and back and finally pulling wildly at his hair. I had no reservations about fighting back this time. As far as I was concerned this was self-defense. When I yanked hard on his braid I was rewarded with a grunt of pain. My small victory was all too brief.

Anakin retaliated quickly. With a painful wrench my arms were pulled behind me and pinned firmly to the table with unseen bonds. Immediately Anakin's lips became brutal, taking what he wanted without thought or consideration. His tongue drove in, swirling around mine in a ruthless attack. Anakin overpowered me with his wanton desire and I felt an answering response rise from deep within me. Shame swept over me when I realized that I was actually enjoying, no reveling, in the loss of control. The fiery wanting consumed any objections or scruples that I may have still had and I was giving myself over to Anakin in the most basic way. I moaned into his mouth in surrender and Anakin responded by pulling me closer, continuing to kiss me breathless.

And then he stopped, pulling back unexpectedly, looking down at my flushed face with eyes heavy with desire. My body shuddered and I frantically gulped for air.

"Marry me."

I stared blankly at him, trying to gather my scattered wits about me. My head was swimming but I finally managed to get the word out through swollen lips.

"No."

His expression was calculating as he continued to study me and then he threaded his fingers through my hair to pull my head back none too gently. A muttered curse rang in my ears and then he attacked my neck with frenzied abandon, his lips trailing a path of fire. I cried out as he nipped hard at the sensitive skin before drawing it sharply, almost painfully, into his mouth. He worried the tender flesh with his tongue, sucking so hard that I knew I would have to hide the mark for days. Anakin's mouth was everywhere at once and the incoherent cries rose unbidden from me. Hot breath caressed my ear, sharp teeth scraped along my collarbone and then his lips moved lower.

Anakin's free hand moved to my breasts and I could do nothing to stop him from undoing the lacing that held the sides of my bodice together. My back arched of its own accord as his tongue dipped between the valley of my breasts before moving to tease first one and then the other hardened peak.

I heard someone whispering 'please, please' over and over in that darkened room. It was with both shock and dismay that I realized that it was my voice I was hearing; my voice that was

imploring Anakin to continue.

He lifted his head from my aching breasts, using his tight grip in my hair to bring my face level with his. My entire body was trembling with need as our eyes met and held for what seemed like an eternity. Within the blue depths I could read the intensity of his love, and his desire, and I knew that he saw the same in mine. He bent his head and I thought he was going to kiss me again until I became aware that his hand had worked its way under my skirt and between my thighs.

My breath hissed harshly and my entire body jerked as Anakin touched me in a way that he had only hinted at that night on Tatooine. Each touch, each stroke was slow and deliberate, eliciting moans and soft mewling cries from deep within me. I was only marginally aware that Anakin was watching me intently, gauging my reaction and moving his fingers against me accordingly. I shut my eyes as sweet pressure built inside of me. But Anakin would not let me escape him, just as he had done that night, he demanded my full attention.

"Open your eyes, Padme, or I'll stop. Do you want me to stop?" His voice was thick and almost unrecognizable as he watched me writhe against him.

Anakin's hand fell still and my eyes flew open in panic. He laughed in quiet triumph before beginning his slow, steady circling again. Anakin's hot gaze held mine, refusing to allow me to look away. I lost myself in the whirling vortex of deep blue as he continued his decadent ministrations. Until that moment, I never knew that love and lust were so intertwined.

I gasped in shock when Anakin slid two fingers inside me, instantly finding and repeatedly moving against a spot I had never known existed. Reflexively my hips began to move in time with his finger thrusts, all the while his thumb continued to circle and stroke me. As the delicious pressure within continued to build to an unbearable level, I was losing all touch with reality.

"Tee'ana et na loska mil tu'et." Anakin said huskily.

The language he spoke was unknown to me yet oddly familiar in that I felt the key to comprehension lurked just below the surface of my consciousness. And then it struck me that he was speaking the language of his mother's people. It was something that he rarely did.

Anakin whispered the phrase over and over until it seemed that there were a thousand voices chanting it in a continuous round. The words invoked something dark and primal deep within my being, something that frightened me in its wildness. I fought a wave of dizziness at the hypnotizing cadence of Anakin's words.

//Ple'ana et kon na kile'ah su nom I'keer//

I was past caring about the invasion of my mind as Anakin's voice wove a spell in my head. I let the words wash over me as I was pulled further down into a world where I did not think but simply reacted.

Overwhelmed and almost senseless with desire and sheer need, my head fell back and my breath came in short, sharp bursts. Anakin growled with satisfied approval and his teeth and tongue found my breasts again. Then my hands were free and I fell back upon the table, hitting my head hard on the unforgiving surface. I bit my lip with a whimper of pain and was instantly soothed by Anakin.

"Sssh, ce'yana tu soleen na."

Anakin slipped a hand beneath the small of my back and raised me up. He murmured unintelligibly against my heated skin as I clawed desperately at the slick table top trying to find something with which to anchor myself.

Anakin increased his efforts, relentlessly driving me towards the edge of the unknown and then my body jerked forward as a wondrous cry was ripped from me. I clutched his leather vest, holding on for dear life, something exploding deep inside of me. Intense waves of pleasure racked my body and I cried out Anakin's name, almost sobbing at the exquisite sensations coursing through me. Anakin held me to him as my body shuddered repeatedly, riding out the intense ripples of pleasure.

When the light and heat had subsided, I slumped against him in exhaustion, burying my damp face in the crook of his neck, my hands tangled in his hair. The only sound in the quiet room was my ragged breathing and an occasional soft sob as Anakin stroked my back and whispered those alien words against my bowed head.

"Et na kile'ah su bey nom teir."

Anakin slowly withdrew his hand from between my legs, his eyes commanding my full attention. I watched in a daze as he lifted his hand to his lips and slowly licked the two fingers that he had just used to bring me to such incredible heights. Shock coursed through me at the primal act. My rather sheltered background had not prepared me for either the action itself or the surge of lust that I felt in response. I whimpered softly and my body reacted with another rush of wet heat between my legs. When Anakin finished removing the taste of me from his fingers, he bent to twirl his tongue in my ear before murmuring one last thing.

"Ti am y'ettu, Padme. Tee'ana kile'ah."

I was physically and emotionally wrung out and could only watch numbly as he smoothed my skirt down and laced up the front of my gown with an almost professional detachment. He tilted my chin upwards, standing there without speaking for a long moment. I looked at him with glazed eyes, still breathing harder than normal. Nothing in my life had prepared me for what had just happened. My mind was still spinning when Anakin tenderly drew the back of his hand down my damp, flushed cheek.

Then without a word Anakin turned on his heel and left me. I stared after him in disbelief and confusion, unable to form a coherent thought or word.

I sat for I know not how long on that hard table, reeling from one of the most intense experiences of my life. Confusion and desire warred inside my head. I could not decide if I should be pleased at the pleasure Anakin had just given me or angry that he had walked away afterwards as if I were a toy to be played with at his discretion.

I buried my face in my hands.

Oh gods, I did not know what to do.

Just the thought of attempting to summon the strength I would need to walk away from him was

daunting. And I was no longer sure that strength was all it would take.

It was becoming patently clear that no one walked away from Anakin Skywalker unless he let them.

## Chapter 9: Succumb 9

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***"Doubt that stars are fire;  
Doubt that the sun doth move;  
Doubt truth to be a liar,  
But never doubt I love."***

***William Shakespeare***

Anakin was impossible. In the course of our daily activities around the ship he took advantage of every opportunity possible to touch me or brush up against me in secret provocation. None of his actions could be construed by anyone observing us as anything but innocent or simple courtesy. Only I knew that with each touch he was reminding me of what had transpired between us and silently promising more. My warning glares and hostile body language did not deter him in the slightest. When I managed to catch his eye in admonition, he would just look back at me in wide-eyed innocence before allowing a slow, mocking smile to spread across his face.

The incident in the library had been just the beginning. Over the next three days Anakin stalked me mercilessly. If I were engaged in conversation with an officer, he would have my insides churning with one of his smoldering looks. When he graduated to once again whispering improper things to me in my head, I learned to quickly end any conversation that I happened to be involved in. I was convinced that the members of the chief staff thought I was a stammering idiot.

But as embarrassing and discomfiting as that was, it paled in significance with what happened when he found me alone. No matter where I was on the ship, Anakin would find me. It was always the same. One minute I would be staring out a view port or reading my datapad when, with no warning whatsoever, Anakin would be there; kissing me, touching me, arousing me until I thought I would implode. And when I was aroused to his satisfaction he would depart as suddenly as he had appeared; leaving me aching with need and frustration.

I came to the swift realization that what had happened in the library had been cleverly planned. Up until that day, I had only had the smallest taste of the joys of the flesh and Anakin had purposely set out to show me exactly what I was missing. He performed his task well.

So I could not be alone and I could not be around others without fear of humiliating myself beyond repair. There was no respite. Not even at night.

The dreams were sweet torture from which there was no escape. So real were they that when I inevitably woke with the bed sheets twisted and my body damp and trembling, I was shocked to find myself alone. My only consolation was that Anakin appeared to be getting as little sleep as I. Both of our nerves were at the breaking point and I was worried what would happen should

Anakin snap first.

It had come down to a battle of the wills.

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Desire and longing were my only reality. The wanting filled my every waking moment and invaded my dreams at night. My senatorial duties and responsibilities were ignored, I lost all interest in what was happening with regards to the war, and, what was worse, I no longer recognized myself as the strong willed politician who fought for what was right and just. Anakin consumed my every thought.

I no longer made daily trips to the bridge or sought out the company of others. Anakin was constantly by my side and the air around us crackled with barely suppressed electricity; I was afraid to see the acknowledgement of that fact in the eyes of the strangers I was surrounded by.

It was the evening of our seventh day on the Republic ship and I continued to unravel.

Anakin had left me to do his evening meditation exercises. Just that morning he had been rebuked by Obi Wan in a communications transmission for not keeping up with his studies. Since Anakin was still under censor and had yet to atone for his defiance of his Master's order to stay on Naboo, he had grudgingly decided it wise to resume his Jedi routines.

The result was that I had two blissful hours in which I was alone. Without the constant fear of expecting Anakin to appear around every corner my mood lightened to an almost comfortable degree. But even with the lessening of tension, I was unable to sit still long enough to do anything remotely productive. Eventually I decided to work off some of my nervous energy by walking the long corridors of the ship.

In the back of my mind was the wishful thought that if I tired myself out enough I might have a chance at a night of dreamless sleep. If the smudges under my eyes were anything to go by then I needed it badly. The events of that afternoon, the whole misguided incident with Captain Benor, and Anakin's reaction, had hardly helped matters.

When I returned to the stateroom, weary yet not sleepy, it was to find that Anakin had also returned.

I stopped so abruptly that the main door brushed against my back as it slid shut behind me. The scrape of metal against my body barely registered in my muddled state. For a long while I stared at the prostrate form sprawled out on the couch in peaceful abandon.

My mind told me to move; to go to the safety of my room as quickly as possible and palm the lock on the door just as I had done every night since Anakin had taken up residence in the second sleeping cabin. But my traitorous body refused to obey. It was my first opportunity in a long while to observe him openly and without his knowing eyes watching me back and I was drawn to him like a glowmoth to a fire.

I knew I should avoid him. There was little hope he had calmed down after the unintentional hurt I'd inflicted upon him when he'd dragged me into that isolated alcove. I shied away from dwelling on that whole humiliating scene, sure if I thought about it a moment more I would go utterly mad. So instead I unwisely let the lure of the oblivious Jedi sink its claws into me and draw me

towards the danger that was Anakin.

As quietly as I could I approached his slumbering figure. I stopped a few meters from Anakin; well outside arm reach should he wake unexpectedly.

He lay on his back with his hands clasped across his stomach. His left leg was bent at the knee and rested against the back of the couch while the right lay straight, its foot hanging off the end of the too short piece of furniture. My lips quirked in forgotten amusement, the designers had clearly not taken into account the fact that couches often served as makeshift beds.

Relaxed in sleep, Anakin's face looked deceptively innocent with barely a hint of the man who had ruthlessly set out to win my heart and to conquer my body. My eyes lingered over the contours of the face that still held the kiss of the Tatooine sun and the blonde spiky hair that appeared almost brown in the dim light of the room. He looked so young but it was just a kind illusion. Anakin's life had been difficult and he was older than his years would lead one to believe.

Unable to stop myself, I moved closer until I stood directly over his prone body. I let my gaze stray from his firm sleep relaxed lips, down the smooth column of his throat, and over the hard planes of his bare chest visible through the opened edges of his under tunic.

My breath caught in appreciation. I had always considered him handsome but then I acknowledged that he was beautiful. Smooth, golden skin covered hard muscle honed by a decade of intense lightsaber practice and Jedi exercises. He was graced with height and broad shoulders and I could not but help to admire the way his narrow hips tapered down to lean, athletic thighs.

I felt a sudden tightening in my abdomen and my face was suffused with heat as a not entirely unwelcome surge of desire sang in my veins.

The slow, rhythmic rise and fall of his chest held my fascinated gaze. My own breathing grew uneven and jagged, sounding overly loud in the quiet room. I dropped to my knees at Anakin's side when my legs suddenly refused to support my weight any longer. The urge to touch him was overpowering. I glanced swiftly back at his face to make sure that he was still safely asleep and then hesitantly reached a visibly trembling hand to rest lightly atop his muscled thigh.

The rough material of his Jedi leggings bristled against my overly sensitized palm. The heat was scorching and I shivered in response. Slowly, almost absently, I dragged my fingertips down the length of his thigh, marveling at the taut muscles that made a man's body so different from that of a woman's.

My breath quickened. Playing with fire is both foolish and dangerous. It is also highly addictive .... and enjoyable.

I remembered that night on Coruscant when I had dreamt that Anakin caressed me as I fell asleep. Up until then, despite the ardent looks and intense aura he had made little effort if any to hide, I had still clung to that image of the sweet little boy from Tatooine. I had willed myself to believe that his touch had been an invention of my overly wrought emotions but deep down I had known. It had not been a dream and I finally acknowledged the truth as my own hand now moved up his body.

That was the night that any real lingering doubts as to what Anakin wanted were dispelled. It just took me a long time to admit it to myself.

A breathy moan passed my parted lips as my fingers made contact with the bare skin of Anakin's taut stomach. It was like touching heated marble, smooth and warm.

So engrossed was I in the feel of Anakin's skin beneath mine as I moved up the hard surface of his chest that I failed to notice the tensing of his body.

In the blink of an eye my wandering hand was captured in a fierce grip and I let out a startled scream as my eyes flew up to see that Anakin was very much awake. His expression was hooded and unreadable as he watched my face go first white then a fiery red.

"Padme, what are you doing?"

My mouth opened and closed silently as I was held captive by knowing eyes. When I did not answer he propped himself up on his elbow, bringing his face a little closer. The motion jarred me out of my speechlessness.

"I - I don't know." I finally managed to whisper.

It was a lie; I knew it and Anakin knew it. I could see it in his expression as he narrowed his blue eyes at me.

His tone was flat with certainty. "Yes you do."

I swallowed nervously and looked away. But I did not resist when, with gentle but insistent pressure, Anakin began to pull me slowly forwards. Like a coward, I shamefacedly refused to meet his eyes; instead I kept my gaze locked blindly on our clasped hands.

I shivered as Anakin's lips moved the air against my ear.

"Say it."

When I remained silent he darted his tongue out to trace the shell of my ear. His hot breath curled my toes and sent frissons of excitement and longing through me. I expelled a shaky breath that turned into a low moan when he nipped at my earlobe sharply.

"Say it, Padme. I want to hear you say it."

The grip on my hand tightened imperceptibly and reluctantly I turned to meet his eyes. Our faces were only centimeters apart; I could feel the warm puffs of his breath against my skin.

"You want me." Anakin said. It was a statement, not a question.

I hesitated, knowing that I was being asked to let a door slam shut behind me as I moved towards a future that terrified me. My heart constricted.

"Yes." I sighed after a tortured moment.

But Anakin wanted more from me.



"You want me as much as I want you, don't you? Tell me." Anakin's voice was low and hypnotic.

At his words I groaned and my entire body tightened in response. Resignation flooded through me and I bowed my head in supplication.

When I finally met his cobalt gaze again, my eyes shown with the same unwavering intensity that Anakin's had always possessed when he looked at me.

"Anakin, I..... "

A chime sounded throughout the too quiet room, breaking the spell and cutting me off before I could speak the prompted words. I jerked quickly backwards. In an instant I was on my feet backing away from Anakin, shaking my head to clear the drugging cloud that had enveloped my mind. Anakin stared at me for a moment as if waiting for me to complete my sentence. When the chime sounded insistently again, he was up and angrily striding towards the door to confront the person who had dared to interrupt him.

The door opened to reveal a young officer. I did not pay attention to what was said. I was numb. The thought of how close I had come to relenting turned my blood to ice. Fatigue and emotional overload threatened to collapse my legs and I leaned back against the wall for support.

Through the haze I found myself in I could just make out the insistent buzz of a murmured conversation. Anakin's tone was impatient and harsh as he barked at the interloper. Then the door was sliding shut and he was standing in front of me.

"I have to go. Obi Wan needs to speak to me."

"Obi Wan? He's on the ship?" My voice was too eager and Anakin frowned.

"No, he's transmitting from Geonosis."

I tried to hide my disappointment at the news. For one moment I thought it was over.

"We won't ever be over, Padme."

Anakin bent and kissed me roughly, pressing me between his hard body and the solid wall at my back. The heat and desire of moments ago came rushing back and I returned his kiss with an abandon born of desperation.

With a muttered curse that insulted Obi Wan's parentage, Anakin pulled away.

Anakin straightened reluctantly. "I have to go."

His entire body was tense in an effort to regain control.

"Knowing my Master this will probably take awhile. Don't wait dinner."

A gentle hand tucked a stray lock of hair behind my ear.

"Tee'ana su kom tiya, Padme?"

Without thinking, without realizing; I answered.

"Yes."

His smile was full of arrogant satisfaction and possessive pride at my whispered response. As he turned to leave he threw a smile back at me that promised a continuation of what had been interrupted.

And then he was gone.

Anakin's words about dinner rang in my ears and I shivered in premonition. It was so ordinary, so domesticated; it sounded as if we were already married.

It did not occur to me until later that I had used the word 'already' without a second thought.

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Anakin had not returned by the time I went to retire.

I stared for a long time at the coded locking device on my cabin door. The very fact that I was hesitating to secure the door had me frowning in self-disgust. I was being weak and ridiculous. I knew that I could not let my basic instincts rule my life, especially now. And I did not trust Anakin to respect the sanctity of my room should he take it into his head to follow through with his silent promise to finish what had been started earlier that evening.

With a mental shake, I straightened my shoulders and determinedly punched in the locking code with more force than was necessary. When I finished I stared at the red light that confirmed the door was locked with a growing sense of unease.

Anakin would not like my defiance.

## **Chapter 10: Succumb 10**

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***"By the pricking of my thumbs,  
something wicked this way comes."***

***William Shakespeare***

I dreamt of fire. Orange-yellow flames that crackled and hissed. Long licking fingers of blazing heat that singed my flesh, scorching it black. Indescribable pain that refused my release. The inferno consumed everything I touched; everything and everyone I loved.

I dreamt of a figure cloaked in black. A faceless figure who spoke to me in harsh whispers as it walked hand in hand with death. The evil creature reached out with a gloved hand and destroyed everything it touched; destroyed all that was good.

Murmured voices in the dark; swirling around me like a spectral fog.

{Wecouldkeepitasecretthegreatestjedieveryonewon'tfailagain}

The sickly sweet stench of death reached out its vapory fingers to burn my nostrils and invade my lungs. The cloying odor clung to my clothes and hair.

Anakin was gone and the dark thing wanted my soul. And I knew that there was no place that I could run; no place that I could hide where it would not find me.

It would always come for me. Always.

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***"These pretty pleasures might me move  
To live with thee and be thy love."***

***Sir Walter Raleigh***

Something brushed lightly against my cheek, tickling my skin like the delicate wings of a Nubian glimmerfly. The touch dragged me back from the realm of that disturbing dream. Irritably, I wiped at my face to push aside what I sleepily supposed was an errant strand of hair.

Half awake, I rolled onto my back, flinging my arm out to the side. My hand landed atop something warm and solid - something that shifted slightly beneath it.

I jerked my hand back, turning my head quickly to find Anakin sitting next to me. He was reclining comfortably against the pillowed headboard with his long legs casually stretched out before him as if he had every right to be there. In the dim night cycle light I could see that he was wearing nothing but his sleep pants.

Disoriented, I scrambled to sit up, calling out for the next level of light. The chrono showed that I had been asleep for barely more than a standard hour.

A sense of dj vu swept over me as I recalled that night on Coruscant when Anakin had come to me after giving chase to the assassin droid; how he had appeared suddenly in the open doorway.

My gaze shifted slowly to where the door of my cabin stood open. The status light on the code panel glowed green as it only did when the proper code had been entered to unlock it. I drew in an unsteady breath as realization set in.

Anakin followed the direction of my gaze.

"My door was locked." I said in a flat voice.

Amusement flared in his eyes at my unspoken question. He made a valiant effort to keep the smug grin from his face but was not quite successful. After a moment he gave up and his shoulders shook with laughter. It was not a mocking laugh but it rang harshly in my ears.

"Oh gods, Padme, did you really think that I couldn't get past something as simple as a coded

lock? You don't have to be a Jedi for that."

I ducked my head, my mouth tightening as I realized how nave I had been. All that time, every since Anakin had moved into the stateroom, I had been laboring under a false sense of security. The one place that I had thought of as my refuge, my sanctuary, had been an illusion; one in which Anakin had allowed me to believe in until he deemed it necessary to shatter.

Anakin suddenly shifted to sit in a crossed leg position facing me. A firm hand cupped my chin and tilted my face up so that I was looking directly into Anakin's glittering eyes; those fathomless eyes that looked at me as if I were his everything.

A glimmer of uncertainty crossed his face, vanishing almost as soon as it had appeared. But it had been there. The idea that Anakin might not be as sure of himself as he wanted me to think was almost too difficult to reconcile with the man I knew.

"Anakin, I think you should leave."

That brief flicker of doubt lent me hope that he might listen to me for once. I might have been talking to myself for all the good my request did.

Anakin leaned in towards me with predatory grace. Though the move was unhurried, almost casual, I noted the sudden tensing of his muscles. I was instantly and uncomfortably reminded of the nexu as it had readied to pounce.

"You don't mean that."

I stared at him with growing alarm. The distressing thing was that Anakin was right. It was taking a monumental effort on my part not to give in to the urge to touch the tantalizing expanse of his smooth chest; to not reach out to trace the taut muscles that rippled when he moved.

I suppressed those traitorous thoughts even as my stomach clenched with unwanted excitement. Once again I wondered how I could hunger so much for what I had gone my entire adult life without. My need for Anakin was growing, not lessening, like an addict's need for spice.

Engrossed with my internal struggle, I hardly noticed when Anakin reached out and took one of my hands between his. I was mildly surprised to find that, unless I deliberately thought about it, I could not tell which one was the metal appendage and which was flesh and blood. I swallowed nervously as his fingers began tracing lazy circles across the back of my imprisoned hand.

Anakin held my gaze with a hint of a smile. The combination of leisurely strokes and his smoldering eyes was hypnotic. Time meant nothing as that moment stretched out, closing out the rest of the galaxy as if only we existed.

My heart was hammering furiously at his touch. I struggled to pull away but Anakin's grip merely tightened, holding me fast.

A faint humming tingle rose to caress my mind. I shook my head sharply in an attempt to clear the growing foggyiness that was quickly clouding my thinking. My awareness of my surroundings decreased as deep blue eyes pulled me into a whirling maelstrom. I had the distinct impression that the room had started to tilt and spin. The only thing keeping me from being overcome by

vertigo was Anakin's touch. As my disorientation increased my free hand frantically scrabbled to clutch at the large hands still holding my other hostage.

"Anakin, please..... go." Desperation tinged my words and I felt a little sick from the dizziness.

The air stirred around me as if moved by a gentle breeze. The sensation that the room continued to spin drunkenly increased.

Anakin's voice seemed to be everywhere at once; behind me, above me. His tone gentle and reassuring but steely with determination.

"I'm not leaving, Padme."

Memories of what had happened earlier in the day came rushing back to taunt me. There would be no fortuitous interruption by some unlucky officer with a message from Obi Wan this time. With a moan, I squeezed my eyes shut to force back the memories of Anakin's smoldering expression as he tried to coax me into admitting how much I wanted him; the silken feel of his skin beneath my fingertips. The fire within me that Anakin had first ignited and then tended so carefully crackled to life with a fierce bellow that left me breathless.

The taste of Anakin was in my mouth; I could feel his body pressing against mine. At first I thought it was my imagination, a fantasy created by a dazed mind; until I felt cold metal at my back, the carpeted floor beneath my bare feet.

My eyes snapped open to find that my reality had altered. I stared in horrified awe at the Jedi who had just moved me over three meters without detectable means. I leaned heavily against the wall at my back as my legs began to tremble uncontrollably. Anakin loomed over me, our bodies just centimeters apart.

He looked pleased with himself. A seductive smile played on his lips as he waited and watched. Confusion laced my expression as I tried to puzzle out the reason for the move.

//I thought we'd start where we left off//

I did not notice that he mindspoke to me. I was too busy trying to remember how to breathe.

The memory of Anakin using the Force to steal the shuura fruit from my plate played like a holo vid before my eyes. Anakin had told me that Obi Wan would be displeased if he knew that he was using his powers for such trivial and playful purposes. How much more displeased Obi Wan would be if he knew his apprentice was using the Force for purposes of seduction and physical manipulations.

I could feel the heat from Anakin's body against my skin through the thin material of my nightgown. His very nearness was playing havoc with my senses. I opened my mouth to say something, anything to stop from being drawn into that forbidden dance but my voice refused to obey.

There must be something intrinsically wrong with me, I thought. How else to explain how the girl who had stood strong as the leader of her people throughout the horror of the Trade Federation crisis and the woman who had survived in the cut throat world of galactic politics with her integrity still intact could be undone by one man? In all other aspects of my life I was independent and strong-willed but when Anakin touched me I became someone I did not

recognize. I became a woman who craved the mastery of her body at the hands of another.

Perhaps, like Anakin, something inside me was warped or broken too and I had just never realized it before.

Anakin brought his lips to rasp sensuously against my ear.

"Nothing else matters. The Jedi Council can't dictate human feelings and they will not tell us that we can't love. I won't let them be my masters in this."

Anakin's hot breath tickled my ear and neck sending tiny shivers across my skin. I moaned as he traced the curve of my ear with his tongue and then worked his way down my neck with seductive precision. My grip on his shoulders tightened sending my fingernails to bite sharply into his bare skin. Anakin exhaled with a hiss of pain but the way his body shuddered against mine told me that he welcomed it. And then it was my turn to gasp as his teeth sank into that spot on my neck that turned my bones into liquid fire and made me crawl out of my skin with want.

All my pretty, noble speeches about duty and responsibility crumbled to dust; the words meaningless and empty. Where Anakin was concerned there was no sensible Padme. He ignited a burning fever in my blood for which there was no cure. And it occurred to me that I did not really want one.

Anakin drew back to look fiercely at me. His eyes bore into mine.

"Tell me you want this, Padme. Tell me you want this as much as I do."

I knew what he wanted and why. Anakin was consumed with the need to dominate and possess me. He had used every weapon in his arsenal in his crusade to make me his. I knew he was fully aware that he had succeeded in his quest. How could he not be when he was the other half of me? But he still wanted to hear it from my own lips. He wanted to know that he had won.

"Yes, please." I answered in a barely audible voice.

Yet another door slid shut.

It did not matter nor did I care.

Hard lips seized mine and the last stone in the defensive wall that I had erected to keep Anakin at bay was kicked aside. My long held beliefs of who I was and what my life was meant to be were exposed to the light to shrivel and die. Up was down; right had become left and wrong was suddenly right.

My only thought as Anakin lifted me up was that the Jedi Council and the Senate could go to the hells of Naboo.

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***"Tomorrow do thy worst  
For I have lived today."***

***John Dryden***

//To the hells of Naboo//

Had those words been mine or Anakin's? There was no time to linger on that confusing thought. In an eye blink I was born back against the cabin wall where my body contacted the hard surface with a dull thud. My expelled breath was swallowed greedily by Anakin as he continued to move his lips against mine with bruising passion.

I had made my decision. Why did I suddenly feel like crying?

Crushing me to the wall, he slid his hands down the backs of my thighs to draw my knees up to either side of his waist. He did not bother breaking the kiss to tell me what he wanted me to do.

//Wrap your legs around me//

I did as he requested automatically without thought or question. I was consumed with the need to possess and be possessed.

Anakin was all that existed. Anakin - my everything.

Smooth skin over bone and hard muscle met my inner thighs. Anakin's heat enveloped me; seeping into my pores, penetrating my skin, settling deep within my being. Shimmersilk glided up in a silky kiss as my nightgown was pushed out of the way to bunch around my hips. When Anakin ground his arousal against me through the thin barrier of his sleep pants my head fell back against the wall and I moaned low in my throat.

Want and need were clawing at my belly like an animal trapped.

Oh gods, it hurt so much.

{Please make the pain go away}

Eyes burning with hungry desire swam dizzily in front of me as Anakin drew back with a ragged breath. They bore into mine, piercing my defenses and stripping me bare. The intensity of his gaze held the same overwhelming mixture of love, lust and possession that had been present from the moment we had met again. A frisson of the old fear shot through me and my throat constricted.

To be possessed was one thing, to be a possession quite another.

A thousand screams rang in my ears. Blue eyes begged for absolution in the cold air of a Tatooine night.

Remembered words flitted about in my head like shadowed apparitions. Unsettling reminders of my misgivings and doubts rose up to taunt me.

{I won't let you go}

Anakin's cheek nuzzled mine with rough insistence; his lips dragging across my cheekbone. He brought his mouth to hover close to my ear. Warm breath feathered against my skin and stirred

my hair like a gentle spring breeze.

"Padme, don't try to lock me out again."

A shudder of apprehension ran through me as Anakin followed his warning with a soft kiss against my hair; a kiss that was vaguely sinister beneath the gentleness of the action. His ability to make a threat sound like a seductive caress only served to feed my reawakened fears.

//Understand. Never again//

A leaden weight took up residence in my chest making it difficult to catch my breath. The sensation of spinning returned with a vengeance as a dull roar filled my ears. I tangled my fingers in his short blond hair in a panicked attempt to ground myself. All my senses were heightened to the point of pain. I was overwhelmed with stimuli.

Cold wall at my back.

Thick hair bristling between clutched fingers.

Staggered breathing against my neck.

Harsh pants sounding from my overtaxed lungs.

Throbbing heat pressing against me at the juncture of my thighs.

Blazing eyes that burned with an inner fire.

Anakin's taste in my mouth.

Unintelligible whimpers rose from me as Anakin started to lick and bite at my ear and the sensitive skin below. I gave myself over to instinct, letting my hips rock rhythmically against him. Each movement brought me in tortured contact with his hard length. I whispered his name on a sigh.

Ghostly words continued to rise up to nudge persistently at my mind as I fought the vertigo threatening to drag me down.

"I will do anything you ask/"

Anything except letting me go, I thought wildly.

Anakin groaned into the side of my neck before continuing his trailing descent to the base of my throat where he drew the already bruised skin into his hot mouth. He worried the tender skin with his teeth, walking the knife's edge between pleasure and pain. The blood hammered in my ears almost drowning out the deep growls coming from Anakin.

Hard hands tightened their grip on my shoulders holding me steady under his searching mouth.

{You should be very afraid of me}

I squeezed my eyes shut against the memory of Anakin that night on Tatooine. How his eyes



had been cold and empty yet burning with anger. How he had used his superior height and strength to imprison me against the rough wall of the garage. How he had almost.....

A choked cry tore past my lips as Anakin suddenly sank his teeth deep into the skin at my pulse point. It was the very same area that he had earlier marked and left bruised and tender.

Something primal deep inside me answered the call of his savage act and there was a rush of wet heat between my thighs. Anakin's hands held me fast as I trembled violently against him, his tongue continuing to flick over the broken skin while his lips applied hot, wet suction hungrily.

The evidence of my response was slick against his stomach; the front of his pants damp from my excitement; proof that my body thirsted for his touch whether it was gentle or rough. He knew that I had enjoyed what he had just done and it excited him. And gods help me, it excited me too.

{Tell me you want this as much as I do}

Anakin lifted his head to stare into my stunned eyes. Our labored breathing drowned out the faint but ever present hum of the ship's engines as he searched my face with a knowing smile playing on his lips. One hand slipped from its vise-like grip on my shoulder to yank impatiently at the drawstring of his pants. Seconds later the offending article of clothing fell to the floor and was kicked aside.

Something warm trickled down my chest from the point where my skin still stung and throbbed. Anakin leaned in, stopping its further descent with the tip of his tongue. A wordless sigh was forced from me as his tongue rasped upwards to the inflicted wound. Suddenly gentle lips and tongue worked in tandem to sooth the angered flesh.

//Padme. My Padme//

Murmured words in my head - seducing and luring me to a place I should never have gone.

//Anakin//

A strangled moan came from him, the sound vibrating against my flesh, and an unexpected realization struck me. For the first time I became aware that I had a measure of power over Anakin. It was my touch, my kisses that he craved like a man who had gone too long without sustenance. It was for me that his breath grew labored and his body trembled and quickened. It was me he wanted and loved despite the terrible consequences such feelings could bring down upon his head; upon both of our heads.

"It would destroy our lives."

I ruthlessly shunted that echoed warning aside as the passionate fire continued to rise within. Those long licking flames from the depths of my nightmare rose higher and higher making music like a hellish choir that drowned out the whispered words.

I just wanted to feel; to stop thinking and just BE.

With his short ponytail in one hand and his Padawan braid in the other, I tugged his head up. My hands were unsteady as they slid forward to gently frame the face that haunted my dreams and

held me enthralled as no one else ever had or ever would.

Claws ripped me from the inside out. Loving Anakin meant so much hurt. Not loving him meant something worse - an emotional death.

The words came from nowhere and I was taken back by how easily they tripped off my tongue.

"Tee'ana et na loska mil tu'et." I whispered as I lost myself in his scorching gaze.

Anakin's reaction was immediate. A deep growl laced with triumph and lust rumbled in his chest as his body shook in response to my provocation. Hot blue eyes sparked wildly; hands slid to grip my waist.

"Bey ni ma'hal su no'le re't." He responded through clenched teeth; his face almost unrecognizable with want.

Hard fingers bit into the flesh at my hips. In one swift fluid motion, Anakin thrust upwards to roughly push himself inside of me. My head snapped back, slamming against the wall. A cry was torn from my lips as my body strained painfully to accommodate the wanted invasion.

My name hovered on Anakin's lips; his breath hissing as he began to move. Using the wall for leverage, he plunged into me with wild abandon, sheathing himself deep within my eager body with each powerful thrust. I sighed with wanton pleasure and fell back into that sensuous dance once more.

This was right. This was real. How could it be forbidden?

Anakin took possession of my mouth in a searing kiss that devoured me with an insatiable hunger. The coppery taste of my blood lingered as he slid his insistent tongue inside to twine with mine in a rough caress. I moaned into his mouth. Fiery heat was building, coiling up from the pit of my stomach to burn me alive.

"...the kiss you never should have given me."

Anakin moved down to ravage my neck, alternating kisses and bites. His teeth scraped across my skin, leaving more marks that I would be forced to hide. The feel of his tongue, wet and warm, curled my toes and wrung mewling whimpers that excited him further.

The sound and smell of sex hung heavily around us. The heady mixture of sweat, musk, and liquid heat serving as an intoxicating stimulant that was quickly pushing me close to the edge. The slick sound of desire created by our bodies was tempered only by my cries and the low moans from Anakin.

He pawed impatiently at the shimmersilk that still covered my breasts. With a snarl of frustration, my arms were forcefully wrenched up over my head. In a blur of motion my nightgown was stripped from my body. I gasped as my naked flesh finally came in full contact with Anakin's hot skin.

Anakin's mouth descended to my breasts; tongue and teeth working to tease and torment the swollen peaks. I whimpered between increasingly ragged breaths. Every synapse in my brain was short circuiting as the sweet pressure continued to build toward a breathtaking crescendo.

Thinking was impossible. Reacting to the primal instinct to couple was the only reality. Every stroke wound me tighter and tighter until I thought I would go out of my mind. Anakin was hitting the same sweet spots that he had that night in the library, sending light and heat to every part of my body.

//Den il na kile'ah su nom teir//

I careened towards the summit but was not allowed to fall. Anakin kept me teetering on the edge of the oblivion that my body and mind were crying out for. Nothing existed but the exquisite friction and heat created as he moved inside me. Pleasure mixed with an all consuming need for release. My body shook with the tension of being forced to balance between pain and ecstasy. Anakin seemed intent on my blissful torture and I heard myself begging him to let me fall.

{I think I rather like to hear you beg, milady}

Daggers of exquisite pain lanced through me as Anakin continued to plunder my body. Deep within I felt my muscles start to tighten around his hard length. A deep growl of satisfaction rose from Anakin.

"Now, Padme, I want to watch you." He ordered in a thick voice.

Those words spoken in that commanding yet seductive tone set me free. The dam broke and hard, sweet waves washed over my body. The mewling noises that spilled from my lips graduated to screams as the hot pulses of pleasure spiraled out in ever widening ripples from my core. Anakin watched me with reverence, wonder and continued lust as I thrashed against his body.

Before the last of the shuddering tremors that wracked my body had even begun to fade, Anakin was crying out and increasing his pace. He angled himself to go deeper; bruising my thighs and churning my insides as he pounded into me furiously. Flesh met flesh as he chased his own release.

Anakin threw back his head and screamed my name, crushing me against the wall as his body bucked, exploding inside of me. Molten heat filled me as Anakin poured himself into my womb. Another wave of incredible pleasure rose and crested, taking me by surprise. My muscles spasmed violently, a final hoarse cry was stolen from my exhausted body. Reflexively, I dug my fingernails into Anakin's shoulders, raking my nails down his chest; drawing blood from one of the scratch marks that went too deep.

When rational thought became possible again, I found myself slumped against Anakin; still sandwiched between his trembling body and the wall. Our damp bodies shook with the aftershocks of our feral mating. Our haggard breathing sounded like thunder in the otherwise quiet room.

I lifted my head to stare in dazed fascination at the blood welling up from the wound that I had inflicted. I raised my eyes to find Anakin's head still thrown back and his eyes closed, the cords of his neck working furiously. The sound of his harsh panting filled my ears as I slowly bent my head to his chest and gently licked the droplets away.

Muscles bunched and rippled beneath my hands as they slid over his glistening skin. Anakin let out a stuttering groan before whispering my name in supplication.

I smiled against his chest and rested my cheek against his damp skin. A wave of exhausted contentment washed over me. Anakin's arms came up to cradle me, one hand tenderly stroking my hair.

//Mine, Padme. Never forget that//

With those words I knew no more.

## Chapter 11: Succumb 11

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***"By your truth she shall be true--  
Ever true, as wives of yore--  
And her Yes, once said to you,  
SHALL be Yes for ever more."  
E. B. Browning***

Harsh, metallic breathing.

Fire and blood.

Death stalking its intended prey.

I woke with Anakin's name on my lips, my throat painfully tight with remembered fear. The heavy arm wrapped possessively around my waist tightened, pulling me closer to the body curled at my back. Anakin's breath warmed the nape of my neck, his lips just brushing the sensitive skin.

"It's alright...you were just dreaming." Anakin whispered into my hair.

Grasping at his quiet, comforting words, I allowed them to chase the remnants of the nightmare away. Anakin threw his leg over mine and pulled me closer still. I relaxed back into the soothing heat of Anakin's body letting his presence serve as my talisman against the memory of that haunting dark figure; of blood and fire.

I had rarely been plagued by nightmares before, why now? And why twice in one night?

"Jedi don't have nightmares."

I shook off the lingering effects with considerable effort.

The ship's night cycle was almost at an end. Soon the lights would brighten to the programmed day level, the ship would come to life and another tedious day would begin.

Attempting sleep was pointless but neither did I wish to leave my place at Anakin's side. Lying there with our limbs entwined, I could pretend for awhile that we were just two ordinary people

who had no obligations or expectations to live up to. For a brief span of time we were just Anakin and Padme with no monikers like Jedi or Senator to weigh us down.

My thoughts drifted aimlessly, eventually settling on the previous afternoon when I had come back to the stateroom to find Anakin fast asleep in the lounge. How he had asked me a question in that strange but beautiful language and I had answered with a 'yes' for some unexplainable reason. Anakin's expression at my response had been so ...victorious.

"Anakin?" I asked suddenly.

"Hmmm?" His voice was thick with sleep.

I shifted around to lie face to face with him, wincing when my sore muscles cried out in protest at my sudden move. Anakin's eyelids rose languidly to meet my questioning gaze. My ability to think was momentarily suspended when his hand began to slowly stroke the curve of my hip. I forced myself to ignore the sensuous feel of his skin upon mine, determined not to be put off from asking the question that suddenly seemed so imperative that I ask.

"What does 'Tee'ana su kom tiya' mean?" I asked quietly, trying not to mispronounce the unfamiliar words.

A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. Immediately my internal warning system went off and suspicion tensed my muscles.

"If you didn't know what I asked, why did you say 'yes'?" He asked in a husky voice.

"I-I am not sure."

A troubled frown lit my face as the smile on Anakin's face widened. Trepidation prickled along my spine and scalp. All my fears and unease rose again to the forefront of my mind. My heart constricted painfully in my chest, my hands fisted tightly and my fingernails bit into my palms. When Anakin leaned forward I barely managed to refrain from jerking backwards.

His voice purred in my ear, his breath warm against my chilled skin.

"Do you really want to know? Does it even matter after last night?"

I swallowed the lump in my throat. Anakin's breath continued to caress my cheek as he waited for me to answer him. The hand at my hip slid up my ribcage to cup my breast. When his thumb began a slow circling of my hardening nipple an involuntary moan rose from me. Anakin's own breath quickened in response.

"Yes, it matters." I finally managed to get out between clenched teeth. It was all I could do to stop from leaning in to taste the skin of his neck.

Anakin brushed his lips against the shell of my ear and whispered the Basic translation of his question.

Immediately my hand came up to still his seductive kneading of my breast. I drew away from the lips that were leisurely tracing the curve of my temple. A helpless anger was growing inside of me. I did not like to be tricked or made to feel the fool. I had been royalty too long to not have an

inbred expectation of respect and a strong sense of propriety that often made me appear overly formal. Ingrained habit forced a frown of affronted dignity to cross my face. Unconsciously, I raised my chin and looked down my nose at Anakin.

"You tricked me." I said stiffly.

The imperious tone, the same one that had been known to make politicians twice my age shift uncomfortably before me, did not have the desired effect. Laughter lit up Anakin's face turning him back into that little boy I had known ten years previous; the charming man who had teased me in the meadow a lifetime ago. The memories tugged sharply at my heart, weakening my angry indignation.

Suddenly I saw myself through Anakin's eyes. The realization of how ridiculous I must look with my haughty expression framed by tangled curls that spilled down my naked chest sent warm color to my face. Reluctantly a smile fought its way to pull at my lips as I acknowledged how laughable my own behavior was in light of our situation.

Anakin took possession of my hand and brought it to his lips. With exaggerated formality he placed a kiss on the back of my hand in a mocking courtly manner.

"I humbly beg your apology, your Majesty." He said before releasing my hand.

I stared into blue eyes laced with amusement.

"You tricked me." I repeated. "It does not count."

Amusement died and his face grew somber as he regarded me with that intensity that frightened and thrilled me so.

Anakin's eyes darkened, "I know."

His agreement did not appease my growing disquiet. There was an odd edge to his voice that lingered in my head. Anakin's hand returned to my hip. Tendrils of warmth slowly uncoiled themselves to spread out from my center, wending their way up and outwards.

I gasped out loud when, with no warning, Anakin pulled me towards him and quickly moved his body over mine. He shifted slightly so that his hardened arousal was poised at my entrance. Desire spiked through me sending my pulse racing and my heart pounding.

The heavy weight of Anakin's body pressed me down into the soft mattress. Two hands, one flesh and one metal, cradled my face.

I closed my eyes for a brief moment as his thumbs delicately stroked the curve of my cheekbones. A sigh of contentment escaped my lips.

"Padme." Anakin breathed.

I met his eyes through lowered lashes; those eyes that could both threaten and adore. Anakin ran a finger along my trembling bottom lip. Want and fear warred within my body and my head.

"I've loved you forever. You know that don't you? I always will."

I knew. Oh gods, I knew.

"You're my life. You're the reason for my existence."

Each word sent a dagger of pain into my soul. There was an air of heartbreaking desperation to his declaration that filled me with anguish. My voice refused to work and I could only stare at him mutely, wondering at the fierce love and longing that hardened the planes of his face.

No escape. The awful certainty that I was the key to Anakin's sanity, his anchor to the light side, came flooding through me with a rush of pain. I was cold, so very cold.

I loved him too much to turn away from him. Or he loved enough for the both of us, came a hiss from a dark place in my mind. Childhood affection turned into something else; my feelings and thoughts manipulated and twisted beyond recognition.

I continued to stare into his penetrating cobalt eyes, mentally and physically unable to tear myself away. Swirling blue sparked and spun, luring me deeper into their mesmerizing depths.

Even when Anakin slowly eased himself inside me, I did not so much as dare blink. My breath hitched harshly as Anakin filled me completely, burying himself deep within my aching body. I wrapped my arms around his neck without conscious thought, biting my lip at the overwhelming feeling of completeness.

Slow, steady thrusts rocked my body. Anakin's face hovered above mine, his lips drawn tight, his nostrils flaring as his breathing became increasingly ragged. The cords of his neck were taut with the effort he was putting forth to hold his power in check. Even so each thrust jolted me sharply, wringing tiny whimpers of token protest from me. But my body proved me a liar as my desire flowed slickly with each smooth stroke.

This possession was unlike our other couplings - before it had been furious and wild; hungry and desperate. This time Anakin was not allowing his control to slip. His movements were designed to stoke the delicious tension at a painstakingly tortuous pace. The pressure of his hard thighs kept my hips from rising up in response leaving me with a frustratingly helpless feeling.

I tightened my hold to stop my body from being driven further backwards. With a final wrench I finally managed to free my legs, allowing Anakin to sink into the cradle of my hips.

Anakin's hypnotizing hold remained steady. A sense of lightheadedness overcame me as I saw my future reflected in his eyes. The unmistakable sound of someone sobbing uncontrollably filled my ears, drowning out the sound of flesh hammering into flesh and our heavy labored breathing. Flames licked at my heels. The smell of smoke and fire seemed to waft past.

I tamped down on those frightening sounds and images; concentrating on the feel of Anakin moving inside me.

Measured stroke followed measured stroke. I was moaning unrestrainedly as his hard length scraped my walls. Each meeting of our flesh tightened the coil of tensed desire. My breath came in uneven shallow pants. I was drowning in Anakin's love and lust.

A tingling buzz brushed insistently against my mind.

//I love you. I love you//

The same words over and over, battered my besieged mind, leaving me a quivering mess; a mere shadow of my former self. I was being torn apart bit by bit only to be put back together again as a completely different person. But for all that I felt alive, truly alive. I needed that feeling as much as I needed air to breathe.

It was Anakin who made me feel that way. With sudden clarity, I knew I could not go back to the way I had been before he brought me to life. Half alive was no longer good enough. The thought of not having his touch, of not feeling his lips upon mine, of not having his love was too unbearable to contemplate.

The moment was chosen well for that was when the irresistible, indomitable force that was Anakin Skywalker, my love and life, reached out to pull me under the swirling waters one last time.

The bewitching words caressed my ears in a silken voice.

"Padme.....say you'll marry me."

The command had barely passed over his lips when I was shoved over the edge. The tightly wound coil deep within me snapped sending intense waves of pleasure coursing through every part of my body. Enraptured, I cried out, my body arching off the bed in an effort to maintain that stunning moment filled with heat and light. Anakin's mouth latched onto mine to swallow the wordless moans that continued to spill from me. The feel of Anakin, hot and hard around my contracting muscles thrust me over and over into that state of blissful nirvana.

Anakin emptied himself inside my body, each stroke sending him deeper. I reveled in the feeling of completeness that this act of lovemaking inspired. It was an addiction that I could not do without.

{Youbelongtomeyoubelongtomeyoubelongtomeyoubelongtome}

Gradually, I floated back down to the feel of Anakin's lips raining kisses down upon my face. Murmured words of love weaved a magical spell in my head.

My fate, our destiny, was speeding towards me too fast to stop. It was too late, much too late to avoid the high cost we would surely have to pay for the deceit we would have to practice.

Trembling hands fluttered up to either side of Anakin's face. He pulled back slowly to meet my eyes that were shiny with unshed tears. Whether they were from happiness or sadness it was impossible to say. But there was relief at finally accepting defeat.

The battle was lost, the war won; the only thing left was my official and unconditional surrender.

Even to my own ears my voice sounded sorrowful. It was as if I were pronouncing my death sentence instead of an acceptance of a joyous event. And perhaps I was, I thought as I uttered the words that sealed our future for better or for worse.



"Yes, Anakin, I will."

## Chapter 12: Succumb 12

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***"Love is the ideal thing,  
marriage a real thing;  
a confusion of the real  
with the ideal never  
goes unpunished."***

***Johann Goethe***

Clandestine arrangements hastily made. Jedi mind tricks utilized despite my vehement objections to keep people from remembering the unwitting roles they played. A secret ceremony performed by an anonymous Nubian holy man at the remote lakeside retreat.

There were no joyous family members standing by as witnesses, no friends present to offer loving congratulations. Only our two loyal droids were there to observe our recitation of the simple vows on the balcony overlooking the lake and mountains.

The absence of those I held dear weighed heavily on my conscious. The rare times in the past when I had dared to dream about what my wedding day would be like, never had I imagined that it would be as it was. No mother or father to look on with pride, no sister to offer words of advice, no friends to throw the traditional flower petals as they departed.

At the time I had felt the loss of their presence quite keenly. But later I would be forever thankful that only Threepio and Artoo were there; that only they had been put at risk.

\*\*\*\*

Anakin and I stood facing each other in the late afternoon sunshine as the ancient words of the Nubian wedding ceremony floated about us on the gentle breeze. The man I loved with a depth that shook me stood tall and proud before me; his black Jedi robe standing in for the traditional wedding finery. Warm blue eyes held my gaze unwaveringly as I quietly repeated the words that made me his in the eyes of the law and the gods.

Up until the last vow was uttered and the blessing given, I could sense Anakin's anxiety. Traces of uncertainty glimpsed that night in my cabin shadowed his eyes as he watched me intently; afraid even then I might change my mind. Only fear of invalidating the ceremony by unwittingly breaching some unknown Nubian wedding tradition kept him from reaching out to firmly encircle my waist and reassure himself that I could not back away even if I tried.

He need not have worried. Anakin's almost childlike fear that I would abandon him at the last second had the same effect on me as it had that night in the garage on Tatooine. I wanted to take him in my arms and hold him to me forever. Anakin was the drug that kept my blood warm and my heart beating steadily. And I... I was his addiction.

"I'm going to marry you."

The words of the Anakin of long ago echoed in my mind. I had not believed him when he had made that startling announcement within minutes of our first meeting - though it had been more prediction than anything else. A shiver coursed through me despite the warmth of the sunshine. I found myself wondering what other visions Anakin might have had.

Near ceremony's end he took hold of my hands and squeezed them reassuringly. All traces of fear and uncertainty had vanished as if they had never existed. In their place was an arrogant triumph that was etched in every line of his face and in the set of his strong shoulders.

//Mine//

Within his warm grasp my hands trembled in response to that one word weaving itself into my mind. I barely noticed when the holy man invoked the last blessing and walked away, leaving us alone once more.

So it was done. We were married.

Gentle but determined pressure from Anakin pulled me forward. He brushed his lips against mine in what was merely a promise of a kiss. The barely restrained power emanating from him was palatable. It was as if he were afraid he would be unable to stop if he did not keep his passion on a tight leash. I pulled away under his solemn gaze, a warm blush rising to my cheeks at the desire glinting in those riveting eyes.

Anakin told me he knew our wedding was not what I had always dreamed it would be. He promised me that he would make it up to me.

And I believed him.

\*\*\*\*

I lied to Obi Wan and the Jedi Council. It was the first of many to come.

The orders Anakin had been given would have seen him on the public transport the morning after our arrival on Naboo. In order to gain necessary time we decided to blame his delay on complications arising from the mechanical arm he had been fitted with on the Coruscant's Pride; an infection serious enough to keep him from traveling but not serious enough to bring Obi Wan rushing to his apprentice's side. Since it was Anakin who was supposedly out of commission it fell to me to speak to his masters.

The hour long Holonet meeting was grueling but in the end it was easier than I thought it would be. Still it had taken all of my political and diplomatic skills to keep my face an impassive mask as I faced Obi Wan and Master Windu. Dressed in my most austere senatorial ensemble, more for the false sense of courage it afforded than anything else, I explained the situation to the two Jedi. I fought back the sick feeling that came over me as I perpetuated one lie after another.

Over Master Windu's shoulder I could see Obi Wan's face, his expression clearly broadcasting his displeasure with the turn of events. But with the falsified medical report before them they did not have any choice but to agree that Anakin would need to convalesce for a few days before heading back to Coruscant.

Master Windu moved off screen and Obi Wan took his place. Green eyes every bit as intense as Anakin's searched mine for any sign that would justify a reversal of the Jedi Council's decision or give him an excuse to come to Naboo. A deep sense of sadness filled me as I realized that the secret Anakin and I shared had turned Obi Wan into an adversary. And for that I was truly sorry.

"Milady, I thank you for your kindness to my Padawan. Should any problems arise please contact me immediately. I wish you well, Senator Amidala."

With mixed emotions, I watched the image of Obi Wan fade away. The polite farewell had held an odd note that made me bristle. The words had been correct and courteous but both his tone and the expression in his eyes had been flat and disinterested. It was as if he were merely going through the motions to appease social convention in front of Master Windu.

I did not like it. Every since he had witnessed my comforting his wounded apprentice in the hangar on Geonosis he had treated me with chilly suspicion and it stung.

Irritably, I pushed Obi Wan from my mind. The next call I was to make needed my full attention.

"Contact Senator Organa, Coruscant. Senatorial offices."

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***"Jealousy, and therefore love,  
are increased when one  
suspects his beloved."***

***Andreas Capellanus***

For appearances sake, Anakin and I did not share a room. Instead we took up residence in the same rooms we had occupied on our previous stay. It mattered little. Our rooms were next to each other and shared a common balcony. The fact that Anakin had been assigned to protect me provided us with the necessary cover of propriety should questions have arisen.

Anakin was nowhere to be found when I returned. The calls I had made after speaking with the Jedi had taken longer than I had expected but they had been long overdue and unavoidable. I was determined to do everything in my power to bring the war to a halt. My greatest hope lay in the group of politicians with whom I had worked so closely with in opposition to the Military Creation Act. That initiative had failed due to circumstances beyond our control but we were a strong presence in the Senate and with the influence of Bail Organa we were a force to be reckoned with.

With considerable effort I dismissed thoughts of the war and all the work I had yet to do. Checking the chrono I found that I had missed dinner by over an hour. After my uncomfortable meeting with Obi Wan and the subsequent talk of war with a few of my fellow politicians, I had no appetite left anyway.

So with nothing left to do but wait for Anakin, I went to change out of my formal clothing and prepare for bed; all the while trying to ignore the image of Obi Wan staring accusingly at me over the other Jedi Master's shoulder.

\*\*\*\*

I was sitting on the cushioned seat and staring into the flames of the small brazier fire when Anakin finally returned.

The flickering light was casting eerie shadows around the darkened room; an unwelcome reminder of that nightmare that continued to plague my sleep on and off. The shiver that ran down my spine had nothing to do with the cool breeze that feathered against my skin.

Suspicious green eyes filled my vision. Pleasant words uttered in cool tones. The cold attitude the Jedi Master had adopted towards me bothered me more than I cared to admit.

But he was not always cold, I reminded myself with a frown of unease. There had been that odd glint in his eyes when he had looked so disparagingly at my tattered outfit the day Anakin was released from the medical bay. At the time I had dismissed it as a product of my overwrought imagination. But that had been before our unusual encounter the day we departed from the Geonosis system.

It had been early afternoon on the day I had accepted Anakin's proposal and, unbeknownst to either of us, Obi Wan had returned to the ship, the investigations on Geonosis having finally come to a conclusion. I was on my way to the bridge after having left Anakin to his meditations, when my path had crossed with the Jedi Master's in one of the empty corridors.

It had been an innocent exchange. Obi Wan had remarked that I looked overly tired to which I had replied that my workload did not allow for the luxury of much sleep. It was polite conversation, nothing more.

After a few more moments of small talk he excused himself to go speak with Anakin. It was then that the situation had taken a strange turn. Obi Wan made to pass me but suddenly stopped with an apologetic smile hovering on his lips. I could only stare dumbfounded as he took my hand and pressed a kiss to its back as if we were being introduced at some Coruscant ball. The memory of Anakin doing the very same thing hours earlier made my heart turn over in my chest.

It was with supreme effort that I managed to refrain from snatching my hand away.

"I hope I did not offend by remarking that you looked tired, milady. As always you are lovely no matter the circumstances." He said in his rich, cultured accent that sounded like warm honey.

I had found myself sinking into Obi Wan's gaze as his green eyes sparked and his hand tightened almost imperceptibly around mine before he released me. My feet refused to move as the Jedi continued past me, his shoulder casually brushing against me - though there was plenty of space in which he could have easily avoided contact. I turned to watch Obi Wan until he turned the corner, his robe fluttering out behind him like a sail in the breeze. I could not shake the frisson of unease that skated down my spine at his uncharacteristic behavior.

Snatches of overheard conversations from long ago came suddenly to mind; whispered talk that had been hurriedly hushed as soon as they became aware I was near; silly giggling behind their hands. In the aftermath of the Trade Federation invasion, I had paid scant attention to the gossip but as I thought back I recalled there had been talk of Obi Wan and the oldest of my handmaidens. At the time I had given it little attention or interest but now....

Attachment is forbidden but intimacy was not. Anakin had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that celibacy was not mandatory among the Jedi.

It took the loud call of a wild tasokla bird flying somewhere across the lake to draw my attention back to the present. A smile of remembrance touched my lips. The tasokla was one of the birds we had always had such a hard time naming because its haunting call mirrored that of another less exotic species. Wistful nostalgia for that innocent time lost added another note of melancholy to my mood.

If there was any moment in my life that I wished I could go back and change it would be what immediately followed.

My thoughts had again drifted back to the Holonet communication with Obi Wan when I felt a touch at my shoulder. Lost in the hypnotic dance of the flames, I uttered the name of the one person who, until that moment, Anakin had not considered a threat. The seeds of doubt and suspicion were planted by my own clumsy hand. My unintentional uttering of his Master's name widened the small fissure that already existed between Anakin and Obi Wan - such an innocent mistake to play such a detrimental role in our combined destinies.

The hand at the nape of my neck stilled and then slowly withdrew. A cold prickle of dread spread up my neck and scalp as I realized the importance Anakin would give to my innocent slip of tongue. With a pounding heart, I bowed my head to stare at my tightly clasped hands resting in my lap. He had been so jealous of my first kiss with Palo and that had been when I was barely more than a child, I thought with a growing sense of hysteria.

Gods, what had I done?

Numbly, I remained frozen in place, listening to the ominous sound of Anakin's boots on the marble floor as they moved around to the front of the seating area. When the sound stopped directly in front of me I could not bear to meet his eyes.

I should have been angry at myself for allowing Anakin to have that much power over me. Deep down in that secret place where the remains of the old Padme resided, I was. But that little voice that mocked my inability to stand up and confront Anakin about his unreasonable suspicions did not have to face the possessive and often volatile Jedi.

The rustle of cloth mixed with the sound of creaking leather as Anakin sank down on his haunches before me. I could hear his uneven breathing over the crackle of the fire and the hammering of the blood in my ears. When he took my right hand in his metal one, I nearly jumped out of my skin.

My eyes flew up only to find that Anakin was not looking at my face but at the hand he was holding. He ran a finger over its back experimentally, his lips moving silently as if in prayer. When he finally raised his eyes to mine there was a look in them that I had only seen once before and had hoped to never see again. It was a look that spoke of loss, anger, and infinite pain; the look that he had worn when he asked me why his mother had had to die.

Tears pricked the back of my eyelids unaccountably. I knew that I was seeing the death of something but it would be several years before I realized the real extent of the damage that I had inadvertently caused.

"He kissed your hand, didn't he?" Anakin asked suddenly.

His voice was quiet but thrummed with some indefinable but hostile emotion. The words sounded like an ominous death knell to my ears. The tone he used when asking that question froze the words in my throat and I could only stare blankly back.

"Don't lie to me, Padme."

His words were made all the more chilling by the almost pleasant tone he used. I shuddered under his fierce gaze. Still unable to find my voice, I nodded slowly in response, transfixed by the way his eyes were turning from blue to black.

"As always you are lovely no matter the circumstances." Anakin quoted softly, mimicking Obi Wan's words perfectly right down to the polished accent.

"How did you know?" The question tumbled from my lips before I could stop it.

Anakin's eyes hardened as he held my bewildered gaze. I could feel the slight tremor that shook his body through the contact of our hands.

"I know as I know everything about you, Padme." His gaze softened. "You're so easy to read."

I blanched, shaken at the import of Anakin's words. I felt stripped bare, exposed and vulnerable. Nothing seemed to be mine alone; not my thoughts, my body nor even my soul.

Anakin stared right through me with a glazed look in his eyes; seeing something that was only visible to him. My heart thumped wildly in my chest and my breath was shallow as I waited in the tense silence that had my nerves on edge. After what seemed like an eternity he dragged his eyes back to mine, sliding his hands up my arms to cradle my face between his hands.

A calloused thumb wiped away the solitary tear that I had been unaware of shedding. My entire body was cold, my skin felt like ice. All I could think of was the way Anakin had lost control that night in the garage when he had allowed his anger and pain to consume him.

A smile that did not quite reach his eyes curved Anakin's lips. I remained motionless as he suddenly rose up on his knees but when he went to lean in I could not stop myself from flinching. The hands cupping my face tightened, keeping me from pulling away.

My breath caught in my throat when Anakin brought his mouth to slide against mine.

"It's alright. It wasn't your fault." He said against my lips on a whisper. "I don't blame you."

There was something lurking in the dark pools of his eyes as he murmured that reassurance that set my body trembling. Logically he may have known that I was innocent of any transgression but logic did not come into play when it came to Anakin's feelings for me. That was a lesson I had learned all too well.

I wanted to interject, to explain that there was nothing with which to fault anyone but Anakin's lips closed over mine making speech and rational thought obsolete.

I could feel the anger and pain that was driving him. It was in the hard line of his lips, the rough

hands that slipped down to cup and squeeze my breasts through their thin covering; and it was in the possessive tone of the words that resounded in my head.

//Su et'ell mi bey na//

Under the hot pressure of his insistent mouth my lips parted to welcome him inside despite the trepidation that was threatening to break me. The first touch of his tongue against mine drew staggered moans from both of our throats. Heat rose within me, fanning out swiftly to singe every part of my body and set my nerve endings on fire.

//Ket ay mi su ni'ell. To ney et ta//

I did not understand the literal translation of the harsh words; I did not have to for I knew their meaning. Anakin spoke to reaffirm his claim, to warn others away, and to remind me that I belonged to him; and more importantly to reassure himself that he alone possessed me.

The reasons and motivations behind his relentless kiss and insistent hands faded away. The feel of his hungry mouth upon mine, the touch of his hands on my body, the pulses of desire shooting their way upwards took precedent over everything else.

A groan rumbled in Anakin's chest as I met his kiss with equal passion, our tongues mating with a fierceness that sent the blood singing in my veins. Desperate for more contact, I pressed forward to meet him with my own blind hunger. My hands roughly tangled in his hair. Soft mewling cries reverberated in the back of my throat, the intensity of his touch overwhelming my senses.

I forgot everything under the spell that Anakin wove around us as he moved down my neck with nibbles and wet kisses, nipping at the tender flesh with an increasing frenzy, my whimpers driving him onwards.

Sliding down to my breasts, he first moistened the fabric over the tip and then sucked the hardened nipple into his hot mouth. I cried out sharply and my head fell back under the magic his skillful use of teeth and tongue generated.

Anakin lifted his head for a brief moment, a crooked smile of satisfaction at my response on his face. Eyes locked with mine, I watched as Anakin slowly lowered his dark blonde head to my other breast to envelope the aroused tip. A harsh breath hissed past my lips. The sight of him suckling me sent a rush of heat between my thighs and I moaned Anakin's name over and over as he continued to play my body with sensuous expertise.

The hem of my nightgown slinked up my thighs. Rough hands gripped my bare hips and with a jerk I was pulled forward to the edge of my seat. No longer trapped by the weight of my body, my freed nightgown was pulled up and stripped away. Dazed, I shakily brushed strands of hair from my face to find Anakin staring up at me from between my thighs, eyes glittering in the flickering firelight.

The air stirred against my skin.

"My wife." He breathed almost to himself before placing a soft kiss against the flesh of my thigh.

When he looked back up his eyes were hot and wild. I could not tear myself away from the

image of Anakin crouched at my feet like a rapacious animal on the prowl, predatory and dangerous. Hot breath tickled my flesh seconds before his tongue snaked out to taste the delicate skin of my inner thigh, leaving a moist path in its wake.

Despite everything that had passed between us up to that point, that new act overwhelmed me. Anakin took the same delight in scandalizing me sexually as he did in undermining my reserved exterior. It seemed he was intent on shocking me every time we made love, making no allowances for my lack of experience.

The sudden and unwelcome image of Anakin making love with some faceless woman came abruptly to mind. Jealousy viciously stabbed me in the gut. All the ways he knew how to touch and arouse a woman had to have come from somewhere. That painful truth, suppressed since the picnic in the meadow, choked me, the razor sharp band around my heart tightened.

Anakin felt the tensing of my body and he whispered soothing words against my skin. His roughened cheek nuzzled me while his hands stroked and caressed me.

Ruthlessly, I pushed the poisonous thought aside, wiping the vision of Anakin with another woman from my sight. He loved ME. He married ME. Everything else was in the past. With great effort I focused my attention back on the present.

With delicate precision, Anakin started to work his way up to his intended destination. The torturous pace he set ended abruptly when he reached the juncture of my thighs. At the first intimate touch of his tongue, I cried out in surprise and my back bowed under the sweet sensation of slow, hungry licks. There were no more thoughts of pulling away; it was all I could do to maintain my grip in his hair and hold on to my sanity as the pressure began to build.

Reality blurred and distorted under his sensuous ministrations. When two fingers slicked inside me to rub that sweet spot, my head thrashed helplessly from side to side. The hot, wet suction and the feel of his crooked fingers thrusting into me worked together to push and shove me relentlessly higher and higher.

Increasingly incoherent cries were torn one after another from my pleasure racked body as Anakin made love to me with his mouth and hands.

//Ke'le mi, Padme. Som mi'le tu eta//

Metal fingers bit into the skin of my hip with punishing force, leaving marks that would soon turn to yet more bruises. When I looked down to see cobalt eyes staring up at me as his mouth and fingers drove me to the edge, I was lost completely.

Only Anakin's name was on my lips, delicious tremors rising to steal my breath away. The pressure from deep within me instantly crested and broke wide open. Hot, sweet waves rolled through me, rippling outwards in ever widening circles to touch every part of my body. My mind was no longer working in conjunction with my body. I was simply reacting to the pulses of desire coursing through me.

Slowly, very slowly, I came back to myself. Weary but sated, I slumped back against the cushions of the couch trying to recover my breath. My entire body trembled with the aftershocks of my release and a fine sheen of perspiration glistened on my skin.



Anakin was resting his cheek on the slope of my abdomen, one hand caressing my hip with languorous strokes. After a few seconds, he reached out to take possession once again of the hand that Obi Wan had kissed. His warm breath feathered across my damp flesh, drawing a shiver from me.

Fearful of Anakin falling into a brooding silence, or worse, I resolved to distract him from dwelling on the imagined transgression of his Master. Letting my fingers slid through his hair, I whispered his name.

Reluctantly, it seemed, he tore his eyes away from the study of my hand to meet my gaze. I grasped his hand in mine and smiled.

"Take me to bed."

Anakin stared at me for a long moment and then a smile spread across his face. I breathed an inward sigh of relief at the welcome sight. Time enough to reason with him about the unfortunate incident and what I was convinced was misunderstood motives.

Rising up quickly, Anakin tugged me to my feet and swung me up into his arms. His lips were warm and firm, gentle and sweet against mine. Anakin poured everything into that kiss; love, adoration, desire, reverence, ownership. It was a kiss unlike any we had shared before and the depth of the love behind it brought tears to my eyes. I buried my face into the crook of Anakin's neck as he carried me towards our marriage bed.

Anakin was my husband, my future, and my life.

Ultimately he was also my destroyer.

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***"We are never deceived;  
we deceive ourselves."***

***Johann Goethe***

For two months I had been besieged. Isolated for the most part from family and friends, from what was ordinary and familiar, I had fought Anakin like a helpless swimmer caught in a dangerous undertow far from shore. Resisting the inevitable as my struggles grew weaker and weaker until giving in was the only escape that offered a chance for peace.

Exhausted, confused, in love - it was so much easier to just let go, to stop fighting and slip under the surface to drown in Anakin's eyes. When all was said and done, there was a certain relief to be found in surrendering an indefensible position, in relinquishing control. Yielding was the key to my freedom .....and my imprisonment.

Anakin's strength and will had lent me the courage to defy convention; to reach out with both hands and grasp greedily at the promise of love and happiness. For a little while I would be able to hold them both in the cradle of my arms, nurturing them as the precious things that they were; while at the same time ignoring the signs that my world was about to come crashing down around me.

Denial is a powerful crutch. I refused to acknowledge the rumors that came to my ears and the whispered warnings that sounded in my head. It took a very long time before those whispers turned into sobbing screams; before my heart cracked and splintered under the weight of the encroaching darkness.

My inability to see beyond Anakin cost me everything.

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### **Epilogue: Sometime During Revenge of the Sith**

***"In secret we met -  
In silence I grieve,  
That thy heart could forget,  
Thy spirit deceive."***

***Lord Byron***

The dark tentacles of evil and decay weave themselves into the hidden recesses of my mind and the ache in my bones grows. Not even the feel of Anakin's body pressing me beneath him can chase away the darkness. The time when his passionate lovemaking could hold the fear and darkness at bay is at an end. There will be no more chances for redemption.

It is done.

Anakin has taken that last step and there is no going back for either one of us now. The path he has chosen is one upon which I cannot and will not follow. It is paved with anger, fear, and death. The weeping echoes of a foolish woman who thought that love could surmount any obstacle serenades those who tread it.

Now there are no more tears to be shed; no more goodbyes to say. Today I leave my shattered heart behind in a vain attempt to guard the soul that is in grave danger of being extinguished forever. I leave to protect and safeguard my unborn children from the vile man who my husband now misguidedly serves.

Anakin will believe that I have betrayed him and his dark rage will explode. He will come for me. His prized possession cannot be allowed to slip through his fingers.

All I ask is for some time to ensure that my children are safe. Once that is done it matters little what becomes of me.

Anakin, my love ....I am sorry. Please forgive me.

Oh gods....is it possible to die of a broken heart?

\*\*\*\*

I see him in my dreams sometimes, not as he was when I left but as I know someday soon he will be. For that nightmare from years ago has come back to haunt me. Once again I see that dark figure cloaked in black and hear the sound of harsh metallic breathing as it hunts for what

is his. I cannot make out the face but I have no doubt that the evil creature that stalks me in the land of sleep is Anakin.

He will come for me.

And I am afraid.

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***"The only art her guilt to cover,  
To hide her shame from every eye,  
To give repentance to her lover,  
And wring his bosom - is to die."***

**Oliver Goldsmith**

*Many years ago a little slave boy who worked in a sweltering shop on a barely habitable planet told a girl queen that he would marry her. She had not believed him; had dismissed him as a fanciful child who played in the realm of daydreams in an effort to alleviate the dreariness of his squalid existence.*

*She was wrong.*

*The girl queen had not understood until too late that dreams and reality had a way of overlapping when touched by that magical boy. When she finally came to understand it was too late for her; too late for her tears and regrets. The boy had become a man and he had come to claim what was his no matter the cost; no matter the consequence.*

*When they met again it was as man and woman, no longer slave nor queen. The young woman succumbed to his charms and power; seduced with his promises of love and desire.*

*There was love for the pair but happiness proved sporadic and fleeting. When the man himself succumbed to the power of the dark side the woman fled with a secret - hope for the future and the key to the redemption of them all.*

*The man howled with rage and pain at his loss, allowing the hate and fear to fester. He focused all of his obsessive energy on finding that one woman - his woman. Beware any who stood in his way. But in this endeavor he failed and without her light he fell further under the spell of the dark side.*

*Thus the prophecy of The Chosen One took another step towards the night.*

### **THE END of the Beginning**

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Feedback very much appreciated.

**Author's Note:** The sequel to 'Succumb' is 'The End Justifies the Means' and it is from Anakin's point of view. It is complete and up at this same site.